

A History of Temple Emanu-El An Extended Family

WELDON, NORTH CAROLINA



LEONARD ROGOFF

JEWISH HERITAGE FOUNDATION OF NORTH CAROLINA



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2013

A HISTORY OF TEMPLE EMANU-EL
AN EXTENDED FAMILY

WELDON, NORTH CAROLINA

Leonard Rogoff

Foreword by Eli N. Evans

Copyright © 2007 Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina
P.O. Box 51245
Durham, NC 27717-1245
www.jhunc.org

All rights reserved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Foreword	iv
I	A Land of Opportunity	1
II	Congregating Jews	19
III	Postwar Prosperity	28
IV	Building the Temple	37
V	Citizens and Neighbors	62
VI	Reforming Judaism	84
VII	Closing a Chapter	89

Foreword

Eli N. Evans

I wish that every community in the South attracted a biographer and historian of its institutions with the energy, insights, and unflagging commitment to research that characterize Leonard Rogoff's portrait of the Temple Emanu-El community of Weldon, North Carolina. In this lively gem of a book, he has provided a template for future writers for other local histories and sets a high standard by such a complete immersion in his subject and such a thorough engagement with people and families and the details in the story.

Doing 37 oral histories of the roots of early families and their friends; searching out old timers and relatives whose families had moved away; finding and studying 14 memoirs; researching the archives of the local newspaper, county libraries, state and university repositories; discovering eulogies and 42 letters going back more than 50 years; examining the records of the circuit-riding rabbis; finding the context of events as recorded in synagogue bulletins and minutes of board and building committee meetings—Rogoff has brought the congregation's history back to life through the memories and records of the Jews who lived it.

Such effort gives the book a story-telling quality that takes the reader deep beneath the surface of what is an oft-told story of small towns in the South. Weldon, Emporia, and Roanoke Rapids began on rivers, later augmented by canals, giving the towns the advantage of waterpower and natural transportation. Railroads were built connecting the towns to markets in every direction. Textile mills and factories gravitated to these towns and behind them came the peddlers and clothing stores, pawn shops, livery stables, retail trade and hardware, bakery and butcher shops and all

the services a town needed to prosper, even an opera house. But this book would have been lifeless with just the statistical shell of the story. The many voices give it life and humor and pathos and finally sadness, as the economy dries up when the interstate highways bypass it and the manufacturing plants that anchored the livelihood of everyone moved away.

Rogoff interviewed many in the “chain of families” which came one by one as links going back decades in history. You will meet the legendary and colorful “Moses” of the community, Ellis Farber (“president of the shul basically forever,” and “the glue who kept us together”); the Kittners (Louis Kittner arrived in New York City with three cents in his pocket); the Blooms, the Freids (Morris Freid was a peddler who put taps on his shoes to protect the heels and toes and would roll down hills to save his shoes from wearing out), the Josephsons, and the Marks. The indomitable Fannye Marks was known as the “fashion dictator” because she ran the best women’s clothing store in eastern North Carolina and “dressed the best families in Virginia and North Carolina for inaugurations and debutante balls.”

Invariably, marriages were arranged and “family webs intertwined with business partnerships.” The stores were “more like our family second home,” one family member explained, because “husbands, wives, sisters, brothers, in-laws, cousins and children all worked in the stores.” On Saturday nights, they might stay open until midnight, violating the Sabbath during the day but “you had to make a living.” But they all scrupulously closed for the High Holidays. The Farbers were devoted to creating community, and the synagogue became known as the “kissing congregation” because of the way they greeted each other as family on Shabbat and high holidays.

The community went to war in the 1940s and some of the boys died, others won medals, others were missing in action.

A number at home lost family in the Holocaust. And when the veterans returned, they found a community that was growing and changing with new families arriving every month.

Inevitably, in the post war boom, suburbs started to develop and golf courses and country clubs sprang up. There could still be social discrimination. One family “lived on a golf course but could not play on it.” But many of the clubs did not discriminate because they needed the memberships. New synagogue buildings became community centers, and with them came “a new identity.” The great “piano controversy” introduced music into the service and more English as well, and visiting rabbis were recruited for the High Holidays. One year, a rabbi couldn’t come, but recommended his brother, who just happened to be on the Borscht Belt doing stand up comedy as “Jackie Mason.”

People “just wanted to be connected” and membership came from seven surrounding communities; statewide organizations were energized that brought people together from all over the state. It was important “among your Christian friends to be active in the Jewish community. They respect you that much more.” Ellis Farber took this role to heart and traveled to country churches to preach. Members conducted ecumenical Passover seders and there were pulpit exchanges. When a church burned down, the congregation gave funds to help the Christian community rebuild.

When the textile industries, the lumber mills and other manufacturing began to abandon the South for low-wage foreign locales, the economy of the communities began to fall on hard times, and many Jewish families moved away. They reunited for high holidays—“It was a homecoming,” many recalled—but the communities were changed forever. Rogoff handles this era, with its shuttered stores downtown and dwindling congregation, with great sensitivity, describing

in detail the community discussions of what to do with the building and the treasured artifacts. It was sold to a minister of an African–American church.

In continuing to follow the lives of the Weldon congregation, Rogoff finds them organizing Hadassah chapters in Norfolk, serving as docents in the Holocaust Museum in Washington, leading weekly services, teaching pre-schoolers, founding new congregations. They attributed their ongoing enthusiasm and leadership to the “seeds planted in Weldon.” When a sanctuary was dedicated in honor of Temple Emanu-El at a Chapel Hill synagogue, Bert Kittner ended her Torah commentary with the observation that “our heritage and our collective memories sustain us and move with us wherever we go.”

Note: Eli N. Evans is the author of *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South*; *Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate*; and *The Lonely Days Were Sundays: Reflections of a Jewish Southerner*. He is chair of the Carolina Center of Jewish Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



Mollie Farber



Henry Farber

I A Land of Opportunity

When Henry Farber, an immigrant peddler, arrived at the crossroads of Weldon in 1892, he saw opportunity. A main road ran through town, and three rail lines converged there. A row of stores stretched from the depot. On Saturdays farmers left their corn, cotton, and peanut fields and came to town for supplies and dry goods. Workers from the mills along the Roanoke River had cash for shoes and clothes. Merchandise could be shipped from wholesalers and manufacturers in Baltimore, Richmond, or New York.

Farber, a short, compact man, had arrived at Ellis Island from Sadiva, Lithuania, two years earlier. He had started peddling from Baltimore with a backpack, knocking on doors until he saved enough for a horse and wagon. Another family story describes him as an itinerant tinsmith, who fixed and installed stoves as an agent for a Richmond firm. After working southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina, he was ready to open a store.

David Bloom had a similar story to tell. In 1907 the 15-year old had emigrated from Lithuania to Cleveland, where he worked as a mason's helper. Two years later, an aunt in Zebulon, North Carolina, his only American relative, located him and drew him south. The teenager, with some dry goods provided by his family, threw a pack on his back and began peddling house to house and farm to farm on a route that took him to Ahoskie, Edenton, and Windsor. He intended to settle in Weldon, but local merchants told him times were tough and pointed him to Roanoke Rapids. That town had more than enough stores, so in 1911 he headed to Emporia where he met a Jewish merchant, Mr. Miller,

who was relocating to Baltimore. Not only did Miller sell Bloom a store, but his family in Suffolk introduced him to their niece Hazel Rose Rosenthal, who was visiting from Baltimore. In 1913 they married.

Ambition and failure pushed and pulled Jews from town to town, from store to store. The opening of a mill created new opportunities. Benjamin Marks, a Russian immigrant, started in Baltimore and headed south as a peddler of pins and needles. He first settled in Kinston in 1904, but prospects looked brighter in Roanoke Rapids. Three years later he packed his wagon and opened the town's first general store. Russian-born Max Perman left Baltimore for Emporia, but he moved to Warrenton where a tobacco market drew customers to town.

The stories of these immigrants, and the Jewish communities that grew with them, were typical of a South that was growing urban and industrial. Weldon had been settled in 1752, and by 1819 a town had formed. In 1835 a canal was built that extended the Roanoke River to Danville, Virginia. The canal provided waterpower first for grain mills and later for textile mills. In 1838 the railroad arrived, connecting Weldon to Petersburg. Its first director was a Wilmington Jew, Aaron Lazarus. More lines followed to Wilmington, Raleigh, and Portsmouth. The Wilmington line, when completed in 1840, was the world's longest. Emporia had a parallel history. On the fall line of the Meherrin River, Emporia was a transportation hub at the axis of major highways and rail lines that extended east to Norfolk and west to Petersburg and Richmond. Scotland Neck, incorporated in 1867, sprouted on the Fayetteville-Norfolk rail branch. In 1868 Enfield was incorporated, and with 500 people it grew into the county's largest town. In 1887 two Greenville County towns merged to form Emporia. In 1893 a New York

investor built a mill in Old Town on the Roanoke River, and two years later Roanoke Rapids Paper created a New Town, the two merging in 1897 to form Roanoke Rapids.

Before the growth of towns a few Jews of German origin had settled the area. A 1783 military roster lists Abraham Moses as a private from the Halifax district. Jacob and Judith Mordecai arrived in Warrenton in 1792, and 16 years later they opened a celebrated Female Academy that pioneered the progressive education of women. In 1861, a Confederate officer, Lt. Albert Moses Luria, spent ten days in Weldon drilling his regiment. Awaiting him there were his parents, who arrived from Georgia. Luria was killed while rallying his troops at Richmond.

After the Civil War more peddlers and merchants of German origin opened stores in Enfield, Halifax, Jackson, Littleton, Scotland Neck, Whitakers, and Warrenton. In Warrenton, Emil Katzenstein sold groceries and dry goods and bartered animal skins. In 1877 Samuel and Max Hoffman's general store in Scotland Neck advertised caskets, men's suits, fertilizer, and farm implements. Simon Meyer, who emigrated from Germany as a 16 year old in 1873, worked first as a cigar maker in New York before taking a job in Cohen's Halifax store. He then clerked at Charles Newman's stores in Whitakers and Littleton before moving to Enfield in 1883 where as "Simon the Hustler" he became a leading merchant.

Businesses were family enterprises as a pioneer drew siblings and in-laws. Two brothers joined Isaac Levy in Enfield, and three Cohen brothers had stores in Enfield and Halifax. Emil Katzenstein's younger brother Alex was a merchant, horse trader, and cotton and tobacco farmer. In 1880 Joseph Stern, a cattle dealer, left Wilson to join his brothers in law, the Hoffmans, in Scotland Neck. Stern's son Sidney opened a fish market, then a butcher shop, and finally a grocery. Jews found

acceptance. Alex Katzenstein was a Warren County postmaster in 1889. In 1896 Joseph Stern was elected a Scotland Neck town commissioner. *The Roanoke News* in 1898 described Simon Meyer as a “whole-souled, genial descendant of God’s chosen people.” He served as Enfield fire chief, magistrate, mayor pro tem, town commissioner, and director of the bank and tobacco warehouse. In Weldon, William Cohen, a druggist, was town treasurer and an alderman from 1902-04. When Sidney Stern left Scotland Neck in 1908, he was town treasurer and a councilman.

The German Jews were too few to create a congregation as they did in Raleigh, Greensboro, Tarboro, or Wilmington. The growth of a permanent Jewish community owes to a confluence of factors. From the 1880s to the 1920s, East and Central European Jews were immigrating to America just as the impoverished, agrarian South was transforming into the urban and industrial New South. Fleeing poverty and persecution, over two million Jewish immigrants arrived in America. High-birth rates and the industrial revolution pushed them from their rural shtetls and urban ghettos. The assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881 unleashed a wave of pogroms and discriminatory laws. The tsarist army pressed Jewish boys as young as eight into 25 years of service. The eastern front of World War I was fought in areas of Jewish settlement and was especially brutal for a persecuted, impoverished people. North Carolina Jews rallied to defend their coreligionists, and, at their urging, in 1918 Governor Thomas Bickett declared Jewish Relief Day. Three years later Lionel Weil of Goldsboro led a statewide campaign that raised \$200,000 for the national Jewish War Sufferers Fund, and the North Carolina Plan became a national model.

Poverty and prejudice left indelible memories. Harold Bloom of Roanoke Rapids, who emigrated after World War

I, recalled how girls were hidden in wagons under stacks of hay and piles of furniture to protect them from rampaging Cossacks, who raped and murdered. His family was poor. To keep warm, he slept over the hearth. He and his brother Charlie, only nine years old, hopped freight trains with 50-pound bags of tobacco to sell in Moscow, evading the police who would steal their sacks. Charlie and Harold joined their Bloom brothers in Virginia in 1920. To avoid conscription, Morris Freid hid from the army and even tried to chop off a toe. Freid fled to join a sister in Baltimore. Bertha Specter, trapped in her native Bransk, Latvia, by World War I, suffered hunger and persecution under both the Germans and Bolsheviks. Painful memories lasted a lifetime. "The people who left Bransk were happy to leave, and my Mother would not talk about it," not even as she lay dying, Janice Specter Kingoff recalled.

The folklore of the pioneering East European Jewish families tells a common tale. The story begins in Poland or Lithuania with a young man fleeing the tsarist army. The story moves to an Atlantic crossing and arrival in Baltimore or New York where a brother, an aunt, or an uncle shelters the poor, young immigrant. Without cash or skills, he peddles. Often the start in America begins in the stockrooms of the Baltimore Bargain House where its proprietor, Jacob Epstein, points the immigrant to promising territories and supplies him with credit and merchandise. Epstein, himself a Lithuanian immigrant who began as a peddler, is a wealthy, philanthropic man who asks no more security from his fellow Jews than a handshake. The story proceeds with a railroad journey to an uncle or brother in a small southern town, where the young immigrant begins as a clerk or a peddler until he has saved enough to open a store, often with a brother or in-law as a partner. He finds a wife in Baltimore, Norfolk, or

Richmond, who moves to town with him. In turn, they bring a brother or in law to clerk in their store, and he later opens a store of his own. The Jews are highly mobile, moving from town to town, as they search for opportunity.

About a quarter of the East European immigrants abandoned the crowded urban ghettos and headed into the heartland of small-town America. Opportunity pulled Jews southward. From 1878 to 1927 Virginia's Jewish population grew from 2,506 to 25,656 while North Carolina's increased from 820 to 8,252. The building of canals and rail lines spawned new industries, leading to the growth of towns. Country folk flocked to the towns to work in the mills, and on market days farm families crowded the streets. German Jews helped underwrite the industrial growth. Charles Cohen of Petersburg was a founder of Roanoke Mills Company in 1895 and served as president of Patterson Mills. Gustavus Milhiser of Richmond was president of Rosemary Manufacturing Company at its founding in 1900 until his death in 1915. Clarence Milhiser succeeded him. Max Hoffman was a founder of Scotland Neck Cotton Mills.

With little money, few skills, or formal education, most East European Jewish immigrants began as peddlers. Max Perman of Warrenton threw a pack on his back and purveyed pins, needles, thread, and fabric to local farmers. Russian-born Morris Freid had arrived from England with five dollars in his pocket. With merchandise from the Baltimore Bargain House, he began peddling in Ohio and Illinois, putting taps on his shoes to protect his feet. "When he would get to the top of the hill, he would roll down to the bottom so that he didn't have to walk," his granddaughter Susan Bloom recalled. "He would trade a thimble to a couple if they would let him sleep in the barn." Fleeing conscription in the army, Polish-born Louis Kittner had arrived in New York with three cents.

After a sojourn in Philadelphia, where he apprenticed as a shoemaker, he was sent to an uncle in Petersburg. At first the poor immigrant shined shoes at railway stations. A customer in Norfolk advised him that he saw many shoeless folk in the countryside and suggested that he set up shop in a railroad town. As Joe Kittner recalls the story, "Our father went to the train station and reached into his pocket and pulled out the change he had and said, 'I want a ticket. How far will this take me?' And the ticket agent said, 'It will take you to Weldon.'" Upon arrival, he discovered the town needed a shoemaker. Kittner printed posters announcing that he will return to open a shoe-repair shop.

East European Jews arrived in family chains. As soon as immigrants accumulated money, they sent for relatives. The Farbers and Blooms were typical as brother supported brother, an aunt or uncle sheltered or financed a niece or nephew. Hyman Farber of Baltimore sent his brother Henry a ticket to America. In Weldon Henry joined an in-law, Louis Levin (or Lavin), who clerked at Max Friedlander's dry-goods store on Washington Avenue. When Friedlander moved to Clifton Forge, Virginia, Farber and Lavin bought the store. Henry married his cousin Mollie Farber in Baltimore in 1902 and brought over his mother and four sisters, whose dowries he paid. With credit from the Baltimore Bargain House Henry financed stores in Warrenton for his brothers in law, Hyman Joblin and Hyman Silvester, whose family had emigrated from England to Baltimore. Another brother in law, Will Farber, settled in Littleton in 1899 after his sister Mollie had sent him a ticket to America. When a Weldon store became available for rent in 1906, Henry summoned another sister in Baltimore, Rosa, and her husband Morris Freid. After his sister Temke's husband died in 1916, Henry took in his nephews Bill and Mike Josephson. Mike and Henry became partners in the

Farber and Josephson store while Bill operated The Leader.

The family chain drew more Jewish settlers. Ben Marks brought his brother in law Mooney Greenberg to town. Three Levine sisters from Baltimore headed the Titelman, Friedenbergs, and Perman families in Warrenton. David Bloom added links to his family's chain. After a few years in Emporia, he sent for his oldest brother, Jake, followed by another brother, Morris, his sister Fanny, and two more brothers, Charles and Harold. Harold, a teenager, was put to work in his brother Morris' store in Lawrenceville, until he moved in 1935 to Roanoke Rapids where he opened Bloom's Department Store at Will Farber's former stand. In 1940 David Bloom's daughter Ruth and son in law, Isadore "Izzy" Novey, a buyer for Thalhimer's, joined Bloom Brothers, moving to Emporia in 1942 after David's son Eugene joined the army.

Jews were highly mobile. Mac Bloom had emigrated from England to Baltimore. He first looked at Silver Spring, Maryland, but moved on to Big Stone Gap in western Virginia. After marrying Lilian Freid, he settled in Asheboro but moved to Jackson to be closer to his in laws in Weldon. Hyman Specter was born in Baltimore but his family relocated to Richmond. In the 1920s Meyer Omansky, an Emporia merchant who had immigrated to America with Specter's father, told his friend that he needed help in his store, and Hyman was dispatched to Emporia.

Jews felt welcome. Southerners respected Jews as a religious people who, like themselves, were devoted to faith, home, and family. Jews, too, had large extended families, and the first generation commonly had four, five or even six children. Marriages among Blooms, Freids, Farbers, and Kittners created family webs that intertwined with business partnerships. Mollie and Henry Farber were first cousins, a custom among East European Jews. Morris

Freid and Rose Farber's marriage was arranged, and Henry and Morris negotiated a \$500 dowry before the prospective groom set eyes on his betrothed. Morris thought he was obtaining a blonde; nevertheless, as their son Harry recalled, they became a "most loving, loving couple." Visiting from Baltimore, Morris Freid's niece Rose met Louis Kittner, and they married in 1916.

Jews created an economic niche as dry-goods merchants serving a mixed-race clientele of farmers and mill workers. A newspaper list of Weldon "Hebrew merchants" closed for Yom Kippur in 1917 included Louis Kittner, M. Freid, The Leader (Silvester), I. Zaba, and Farber & Josephson. The Samet family, related to the Marks, also had a store, and Ted Samet was a traveling hosiery salesman. Sam Garfinkle purchased animal pelts, which he shipped north. In Roanoke Rapids customers found on the two floors of the Marks Department Store a miscellany of goods including farm implements, bridles and saddles, and ladies fashions. "On Saturdays, the country people would catch the train and come into town early in the morning, then catch the late afternoon train back," Harry Kittner recalled. "In the downtown around the Weldon depot were nearly a half-dozen clothing stores, a hardware store, farm supplies, livery stables, hotels, restaurants, a hat shop, bakeries, and an opera house."

One night, after the Spanish-American War ended, a troop train heading north from Florida brought Henry Farber a rude awakening. Asleep in back of the store, he heard hard pounding on the door. He was greeted by a soldier who pointed a gun at him, demanded civilian clothing, and threatened to burn the store if he did not comply. The store sold out, but Farber was handed a warrant for violating blue laws. Charges were dismissed on grounds that he had acted at gunpoint.

Stores were family enterprises—"it was more like our second home," as Joan Bloom Benas recalled. On Saturday nights, stores might stay open as late as midnight. "You had to make a living," Bill Kittner added. Husbands, wives, sisters, brothers, in laws, cousins, and children all worked in the store. The work was hard. After a car killed Benjamin Marks in 1922, his wife Rose with Abe Norinsky, who came down from Baltimore, ran the department store. Her daughter Fannye manned the cash register. Children worked to supplement the family income. When trains pulled into Weldon, Dave Kittner climbed aboard to sell the *Literary Digest*, later passing the franchise to his brother Harry. For passengers who changed train lines, boys served as porters, carrying bags up and down the stairs.

The storekeepers enjoyed at least modest success and began upgrading their merchandise and expanding. Bloom stores opened in Emporia, Edenton, Franklin, and Lawrenceville. In the 1920s Weldon had seven Jewish-owned stores as H. Foreman and L. Juren joined the established merchants. Louis Kittner, who started with shoe repair, took in women's clothes and then men's clothing until it grew into Kittner's Department Store, outfitters to families. "A Trial Is All We Ask" was its motto. By the 1940s he abandoned shoe repair. Roanoke Rapids saw new mercantile activity. A father and son, Isaac and Jake Spire, operated a junkyard, and Jack Weissner opened a clothing store. Sam and Jeanette Marks started a shoe shop in 1933.

Southerners appreciated the honesty and industry of the immigrant merchants and welcomed them. Henry Farber was quick with a loan for anyone in need, and when he chopped wood for his stove, he cut extra to give to the poor, even after he installed a coal furnace. Customers sat around Kittner's shoe shop with its electric machine and conversed with the friendly

cobbler, helping him to learn English—and wondering if he would ever swallow the tacks he held in his mouth. Jewish immigrants were eager to become Americans and Anglicized their names. Cobbler Louis Kittner had been born Leib Kitnik. Mac Bloom shortened his name from the German Blumenthal. Pearl and Adeline Silvester went by Peggie and Iney. “They picked up these nicknames because the neighborhood kids didn’t understand my grandmother calling them in Yiddish,” Marian Silvester Winer explained. Henry Farber became a 32nd degree Mason and was elected to the town council in the 1920s. Dave Bloom, also a Shriner, felt welcome in Emporia where he served on the town council for 30 years.

For most Jews, the household language was English as immigrant parents raised an American generation. Yet, they also held onto Yiddish and spoke a heavily accented English. For Rose Specter, who had emigrated in 1921, Yiddish was her first language. Many parents conversed in Yiddish when they did not want their children to understand. Joe Kittner recalled, “When I was a kid, my grandmother used to come down [from Baltimore], and she was appalled at how little Yiddish we knew, so she sat me and I think my brother on the back porch and made us repeat Yiddish expressions.”

Nationally, the 1920s were difficult years for Jews even as they prospered. Campaigns for “100 percent Americanism” stoked anti-immigrant feelings, and a Red Scare provoked fears of foreign radicals that led to the arrest of thousands and threatened them with deportation. Congress put an end to mass immigration. Universities imposed quotas on Jewish enrollment. Henry Ford’s *Dearborn Independent* gave anti-Semitism a public voice. In the 1920s and 1930s evangelist Mordecai Ham led revivals across eastern North Carolina where he denounced Jews for vice and greed. He attacked Chicago philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, who endowed

some 5,000 schools for African Americans across the South. A Jewish salesman, Joseph Needleman, was mutilated by a mob outside Williamston in 1925 for allegedly offending a man's girlfriend. The Klu Klux Klan revived in the 1920s although locally, as was often the case in the South, Jews did not feel targeted. Polish-born Louis Kittner was invited to join. "They didn't know that they're not supposed to like Jews," Harry Kittner reflected. He recalled his brother Joe's description of a Klan march as a comic spectacle:

One day the Klan was marching with their hoods on, and my brother was standing on the sidewalk with my father. He wondered aloud, "I wonder who are they?" My father said, "Well, you see that man, he's Joe Smith. See that man—he's George So-and so." My brother said, "How do you know?" My father said, "I recognize the shoes I sold them."

The 1926 Closing Exercises of the Sabbath School reveal a hyphenated, Jewish-American identity. The program was held at the Methodist Church, which was decorated with flower baskets. The opening hymn was the Zionist anthem "Hattikvah" and the closing hymn was "America the Beautiful." Christian ministers, Rev. G. W. Perry and Dr. D. B. Zollicoffer, delivered the invocation and benediction. Ellis Farber and W. B. Josephson awarded the children the Loving Cup for attendance. Rabbi F. I. Rypins of Greensboro's Reform congregation delivered the main address. *The Roanoke News* reported that a "real 'Christian spirit' prevailed" although the Hebrew hymn sounded "very weird and beautiful." In the early 1930s Rabbi Edward Calisch of Richmond's Beth Ahabah congregation delivered

the baccalaureate sermon at Weldon High School, an unusual honor for a Jew in a traditionally Christian ceremony. “We always had good rapport with the Christians,” Isabel Freid Vatz felt.

Second-generation Jews recall a Southern upbringing of hanging out with the neighborhood kids, the pranks and escapades that made small-town life so memorable. “We used to play in the sand under the Silvester house,” Isabel Freid Vatz recalled, still laughing over childhood mischief. “Some of us girls would fill balloons with sand and drop the sand on Miss Cleary’s sidewalk that she just swept.” Although Jewish children were tightly bonded, their friends were mostly not Jewish. Louise Farber wanted her best friends Ethel Crew and Margaret Joyner to share honors with her as class valedictorian, but only Louise was chosen. Ellis Farber—who lettered in track, baseball, and basketball—was an avid boy scout as was Sam Marks. Herman Farber played football and tennis, and with his brothers built their own court. Another athlete, Dave Kittner, was nicknamed “Schwartz” by his high-school football coach in honor of a Jewish player at Notre Dame. Sisters Fannye and Fleeta Marks were remembered as flapper girls who joined the town’s party crowd. At college Fannye was “campused” after she got caught chewing tobacco with some boys from the University of Richmond. Weldon was the Rockfish Capital of the World, and the Roanoke River played a large role in their Southern childhoods. Ellis Farber once set sail with 17 scouts on a homemade sailboat that ended in near disaster when their craft foundered. On a river trip with his buddies, Herman Farber nearly drowned when their canoe tipped.

In the schools the children learned to become Americans. There were prayers and Bible readings in the classroom, but Jewish kids remained silent. When 15-year old Harold Bloom arrived in America, he was Jewishly literate, having had his

bar mitzvah, but he was put into first grade since he spoke no English. He soon dropped out. American-born children had it easier, and their names appeared on Graded School Honor Rolls. Few recall any anti-Semitism growing up, although some recall occasional schoolyard taunting. Ruth Perman Diamond in Warrenton remembered one incident. Spending a week at a friend's house, she was taken to a country church where the "preacher stood up and swore that I was going to hell." She was crying when she returned home until her mother reassured her that Jews did not believe in hell.

Some families permitted interdating, but others did not. In Warrenton Ruth Perman Diamond was permitted to date Christian boys, but as soon as she graduated from Warrenton high school, she was sent to Baltimore, where her sister and three brothers had settled. "They were afraid that I would meet and marry a non-Jew, which was unheard of in those days," she felt. Janice Specter recalled, "My parents wanted me to marry Jewish, and they wanted Roland [her brother] to marry Jewish, and that was the biggest thing of all to your parents."

The search for Jewish spouses pulled the second generation from town. As Mort Farber recalled, "Well, any Jewish social life, you had to go to the city." The Silvester daughters settled in Wilson, Baltimore, and Richmond. Lucille Kittner married Joe Frank of Wilson and moved to Portsmouth. Lillian Freid and Mac Bloom were married in Baltimore, where the English-born immigrant had settled. When Fillmore Coblenz, a New Yorker who had settled in Fayetteville, heard about a single Jewish woman in Weldon, he headed there to meet Florence Freid. They married in 1941 and settled in Fayetteville. Marriage created family networks across communities.

Parents labored in the stores so that their children would have better lives. Joe Kittner recalled his father telling him

“that I wasn’t worth 35 cents in the business. I didn’t know what a college was, but he said I should go to college.” Ellis Farber attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill while his brother Herman went to Wake Forest, later earning a medical degree at the University of Pennsylvania. Herman was the first Jew to attend Wake Forest, which earned him the sobriquet of “Baptist Jew.” He was elected president of his class. Unusual for the time, women were also encouraged. Louise Farber held a degree in music from Women’s College (now UNC-Greensboro) and went to Richmond. Isabel Freid went to Meredith College, later matriculating at Women’s College. Fannye Marks graduated from Westhampton College in 1925 (now the University of Richmond) where she was voted “best dressed.”

Education pulled the second generation into the professions away from the store—and away from the small-town South—to places where opportunities were brighter. Of the six Kittner children, only two remained in Weldon. Dave Kittner, after attending UNC, obtained a law degree from the University of Pennsylvania and practiced in Philadelphia. Joe Kittner left for Washington where he became chief counsel for the Federal Communications Commission. Ben Josephson attended UNC’s medical program before receiving his degree as a pediatrician in New York. Herman Farber became a leading pediatrician in Petersburg. Will Farber’s children settled in Greensboro and Baltimore. Since public schools only went to tenth grade, Ben Marks was sent to the Staunton Military Academy in Virginia and then to business school in Baltimore, where he worked for the *Baltimore American*. Several women found opportunities with the federal government in Washington. Isabel Freid was employed by the FBI, and Dorothy Kittner worked for the Labor Department.

Business kept Jews connected to distant metropolitan Jewish communities. Seasonally, they advertised new goods, as I. J. Kaplin boasted in a 1910 ad, “fresh from the northern markets.” The Baltimore Bargain House, Harriet Bloom Dickman remembered, “used to give my father merchandise in September and he didn’t have to pay for it until January, after the Christmas season. It was their way of helping the young Jews to go ahead in this world.... It was a free loan society.” Jewish jobbers and salesmen visited the merchants in their stores and brought their big-city Yiddishkeit with them along with merchandise. Susan Bloom Farber recalled how the salesmen spent the night with them in Jackson, happy to find a Jewish home. One, Nathan Cohen, reciprocated the hospitality when the Blooms traveled to Virginia Beach. Yiddish-speaking salesmen stayed at the Specter home in Emporia, where Bertha kept a separate set of dishes for kosher meals. Teddy Goldfarb, a jobber from Norfolk, “came through town every Monday morning with hot bagels and rye bread,” Harriet Bloom Dickman recalled. “Do I have to tell you that my father bought from him for years?”

Families were tightly bound across communities, and mutual help was unquestioned. After closing his store, Bill and Ida Josephson drove to Petersburg and Richmond to visit relatives. They packed their car with toys for nieces and nephews, and Bill was quick with a loan to help family members. “He was just a very generous man,” his niece Betty Packer recalled. For Ben Josephson, an only child, his cousins in Richmond were like brothers and sisters. For big city cousins a trip to the small-town South was magical, and many have fond memories of staying weeks, and often entire summers, with a grandparent. “Weldon to us was like a playground,” Betty Packer recalled. Jewish transients flowed in and out. Louis and Rose Kittner always made room in

their home for a visitor who needed a bed or a meal.

Families also remained in touch with parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles in the Old Country. They packed bundles of clothes from their stores to send to relatives in Europe. To save the tariff for new clothes, they rubbed or put holes in them so they appeared second hand. Harry Kittner recalled putting on new shoes and going into the backyard to scuff the soles in dirt before sending them abroad.

The Depression detoured American dreams of upward mobility. In Weldon a cotton mill that manufactured men's underwear closed, and the town's largest lumber mill went broke. Banks shut their doors. Children went to school hungry. Ida Josephson explained to their son Benjy that the family could not afford to buy him a bicycle. Times were tough, Harry Freid recalled, but not as bad as elsewhere. He recalled how his mother made two bags of lunch so that he could give one to a needy child at school. After a cousin left the family store in Scotland Neck in debt, Ellis Farber, as the eldest son, left UNC to restore the business to solvency. Henry Farber helped his brother in law Will Farber. Morris Freid lost his life's savings of \$250 when the banks failed. Fannye Marks, returning home from a tuberculosis sanatorium, joined her widowed mother at the family's department store, the largest in Halifax County, but it failed, and the women opened a smaller store, the Ladies Specialty Shop. Louis Kittner bought a car in 1927, but he couldn't afford to keep it and was unable to purchase another until 1945.

Family members sacrificed for each other. Ellis Farber paid for his brother Herman's medical-school education. Fannye Marks personally repaid the debts of the family department store although not legally bound. When Joe Kittner went to Chapel Hill in 1933, he worked three jobs to support himself. The North Carolina Association of Jewish Women maintained

the Sophie Einstein Student Loan Fund, and Louis Kittner hitchhiked to Wilmington to obtain a loan. Joe recalled his college days as “washing dishes and cleaning rooms and trying to study a little bit.” He went room-to-room selling drinks and sandwiches and broke rocks for the tennis court at 25 cents an hour. When he finished law school, his parents impressed upon him the obligation to support his siblings through college. Harry Kittner worked for a year before attending UNC so that his sister could go to business college.



Rose and Morris Freid family



Louis Kittner's shoe store



Rose and Dave Bloom



Rose and Louis Kittner

II

Congregating Jews

“The Jewish people were a scattered nation in Eastern North Carolina,” Harry Kittner observed, although, as Bob Liverman put it, Weldon was the “seat and heart of the Jewish community.” Weldon had a larger number of established families, who also tended to be more observant, and regional congregational efforts centered there. Henry Farber was devoted to creating a Jewish community.

In 1912 under Henry Farber’s leadership, Morris Freid, Benjamin Marks, Hyman Silvester, and Sam Garfinkle of Weldon organized a congregation. Soon to join them were Will Farber of Roanoke Rapids, and Louis Kittner and Mike Josephson of Weldon. At first they borrowed Torah scrolls from larger communities to hold High Holiday services. A September 19, 1915, newspaper report noted that “our brethren of the Hebrew faith” closed their stores for the holidays. When someone needed a minyan (prayer quorum of 10 men) to observe a *yahrzeit* (memorial service), they gathered in members’ homes or in the rear of their stores.

As was typical, local Jewish immigrants were mostly young families, and concern for the Jewish future of the growing numbers of children inspired efforts to organize. A Sunday school met first at Mollic and Henry Farber’s home. In 1924 Bill Josephson organized the Weldon Sabbath School for both adults and children and served as its superintendent. A small-town storekeeper, Bill Josephson found “intellectual sustenance” in the temple, his granddaughter Anne recalled. The teachers included Ellis Farber, Sadie Silvester Friedman, and Lillian Freid Bloom. A very religious immigrant, I. J. Kaplin, a Josephson in law, tutored the boys.

Isabel Freid Vatz remembered attending Sunday School in the Silvester's kitchen and then going to another home for religious training. Out-of-town rabbis visited and sermonized. "I think I was confirmed about ten times," she recalled. The North Carolina Association of Jewish Women once offered a loving cup for the Sunday School with perfect attendance for three years. Also in the race were Durham, Greensboro, Raleigh, and Wilmington. "If one of us didn't come to Sunday School on time," Isabel recalled, "somebody quickly drove to the house, yanked us out of the bed, and marked us present with such concentration and cooperation that the Weldon Sabbath School won that loving cup!" At Purim, as the oldest girl, Isabel customarily played Queen Esther, joined by Joe Kittner as Mordecai, and Mutt Farber as Haman. At the school year's end, families piled into cars for a picnic. "Every time I pass Holt's Lake, that's in Smithfield, I think of the wonderful swim gala we had for our closing Sunday School picnic," Isabel reminisced.

Lacking Jewish resources, small towns were colonies of metropolitan areas. Baltimore, Richmond, and New York were not just the places where Jews supplied their stores, but they also served as Jewish homelands where they visited relatives and restocked their Jewish cupboards and bookshelves. Families traveled to Baltimore to spend Passover or the High Holidays with parents or in laws. Several men—Henry Farber, Hyman Silvester, Max Perman—received training in the ritual slaughter of chickens in Baltimore, and Farber also purchased the congregation's first shofar there. Boys were sent to live with relatives in larger communities for their bar mitzvah year. The Farber and Perman boys went to Baltimore. Harry Freid lived with a family in Petersburg, who had a son his age. The Kittner brothers were sent to an aunt in Kingston, New York, where they studied Hebrew after school nearly every day.

One member recalled local Judaism as “more or less orthodox.” The religiosity of the immigrants was traditional. With the mill workers’ payday on Friday night and farmers visiting town on Saturday, Jews could not afford to keep their stores closed on the Sabbath although they closed scrupulously for the High Holidays. Such Old World customs as *shluggen kapporas*, swinging a live chicken around one’s head to expiate sin on Yom Kippur, persisted. “Customs were practiced in the home and became instilled in you,” Harry Kittner observed. On Friday nights Mollie Farber gathered family and strangers alike for Sabbath dinner. Not lighting a fire on the Sabbath, she kept cholent warm on the stove and spent the day sitting in a rocker reading her prayer book. When a boy was born, a mohel (ritual circumciser) was summoned from Richmond or Petersburg. Without a local burial ground community members were interred in Jewish cemeteries in Richmond and Petersburg, generally where the deceased had family. When Rose Kittner’s father died, she wore black for eleven months. Mourners tore their clothes and abstained from the pleasures of a normal life for the mourning period.

The Passover seder was a memorable family occasion. “I remember the kitchen stove with the hot water tank attached and the tin tub we bathed in the kitchen,” Isabel Freid Vatz recalled. “No matter how cold it was on the night of the seder, Momma always let me take off my long underwear and let me dress in new clothes.” Holidays were family reunions. Even after the second-generation Silvesters left Weldon in the 1930s, they returned for the holidays where the children, too, put on their prettiest clothes for their grandmother’s approval. Starting in the 1940s, the Bloom brothers began hosting community seders at the Emporia Masonic Lodge.

Foodways demonstrated how Jews adhered to Jewish tradition while embracing Southern customs. A willingness

to adapt was reflected in the kosher practices. Chicken was a staple, and families kept coops in their yards. After the birds were killed, the women scalded them in hot water, *flicking* them to remove the feathers. Community elders did the ritual slaughtering. Ruth Perman Diamond recalled feeling horrified as her father beheaded the chickens and the birds flapped about the backyard. In the 1930s Rose Kittner's sister Bessie and her brother in law, Ben Goldman, a butcher, moved to Weldon to open a grocery. The schochet, a "Rabbi" Rubinstein from Raleigh, traveled monthly to a dairy farm, owned by Mr. Hamill, to slaughter the cow, which was brought to Goldman's shop. Kosher meat packed in dry ice also came down by bus and rail from Norfolk and Richmond. The Freid children gathered excitedly at the rail station to await the package. The Bloom household in Roanoke Rapids was "not strictly kosher," Joan Bloom Benas recalled, but "pork and shellfish were never brought into the house, and we always changed dishes for Passover." Hyman Silvester used his backyard cherry trees to make jugs of wine, a Jewish ritual necessity despite Prohibition. Friday mornings his wife baked challah and *milkchig* buns and shared them with her neighbors. Like many traditional cooks, Marian Silvester Winer's grandmother cooked without recipes, "a handful of this, a little of that."

Local Jews took special pride in making their own dill pickles. At a local depot that served Mount Olive, Jews could buy cucumbers. When Harry Freid embarked on his annual pickle making, his wife Evelyn felt like an exile in her own kitchen. The whole community anticipated his pickles, which he generously gave away. Mason jars were faithfully returned for next year's supply. Betty Packer recalled going with her Aunt Ida Josephson to purchase some dill from a farmer, but not finding her at home, her aunt, then in her 80s, climbed the fence and picked some herb, paying her later.

Several families, especially where the mother worked in the store, taught their African-American housekeepers the art of Jewish cooking. The Permans in Warrenton kept a kosher home, and their cook made briskets, *kneidele* (dumplings), and gefilte fish, using three different kinds of fish. Harriet Bloom Dickman remembered a houseworker who “slaughtered the chickens, koshered them; even though we didn’t have a *schochet*, she did it according to directions.” The chickens were hung from the clothesline and then *flicked*. Their menus included chopped liver as well as collards, biscuits, and fried chicken. The cook made “the best chicken soup in the world,” Harriet remembered. When the Freids remodeled their kitchen, Morris Freid wanted both a wood and electric stove to ensure that his favorite dishes were prepared properly. With pecan and cherry trees in the yard, their housekeeper, Dell, cooked “the world’s best pie.”

A Synagogue

After holding services in the Weldon Masonic Hall, in 1928 the congregation located up a flight of rickety stairs above the Silvester’s clothing store at 133 Washington Avenue. Its name, the Hebrew Community Center of Weldon and Roanoke Rapids, expressed civic pride. Not only did Jews have a space to worship, but they established a Jewish place among the area’s churches. The upstairs synagogue consisted of a large room divided in the back by sliding doors. In the front was a small *bimah* (prayer platform) with a portable ark. Henry Farber, who enjoyed working with his hands, built the first ark from shipping crates. Mike Josephson converted a tailoring display into a pulpit. The room lacked a *mehitzah* (curtain) to separate men and women, but women traditionally sat in the back. Behind the *bimah* were two

smaller rooms where children gathered for classes and to play during services. Over the years the Center was enhanced as families made material contributions to honor their elders.

In addition to the Sunday School and Bible classes, the congregation held Friday-night and High Holiday services. The worship, conducted entirely in Hebrew, was Orthodox, and those who did not know the language sat there not understanding the prayers. Joan Bloom Benas recalled the old men “davening and swaying as they prayed.” The Torah readers were Meyer Omansky, Henry Farber, Will Farber, and Mooney Greenberg.

The growth of Hebrew Center of Weldon and Roanoke Rapids reflected state and national trends. Local Jews organized as new synagogues were rising in Winston-Salem, Durham, Raleigh, Greensboro, and Gastonia. In the 1920s, progressive Jews began thinking of the synagogue not just as a house of prayer, an immigrant shul, but as a community center that brought Jewish worship, education, and social life under one roof. A small kitchen was added to the rooms, and Sisterhood purchased dishes and cooking utensils for Oneg Shabbats and community dinners. With Jews few and scattered, the synagogue was a place not just to worship, but to meet other Jews.

In 1939, at the urging of Louis Kittner, the congregation began importing rabbis from the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary in New York to conduct High Holiday services. As the immigrants Americanized and a native-born generation arose, religious practices evolved. Immigrants raised in East European Orthodoxy were comfortable with the Hebrew liturgy, but they were concerned about their American-born children. Like many Orthodox congregations, the Hebrew Center of Weldon and Roanoke Rapids was evolving toward Conservatism, which was growing into the nation’s largest Jewish movement. Conservatism accommodated

American Jews who wanted gender equality, mixed seating, English prayer, and shorter services. The communal accord enjoyed at the Hebrew Center was not typical. In many congregations the immigrant generation, schooled in the old ways, was unwilling to compromise and conflicts erupted.

Jewish Americans

The 1930s were not comfortable years for Jews as the Nazi scepter arose across Europe and raised anti-Semitic anxieties at home. Voices like Father Coughlin and the isolationist American Firsters railed against a “Jew Deal” or a “Jew war.” Harriet Bloom remembered that her father was fearful to reveal his Russian name, fearing retaliation from Klansmen or pro-Nazi American Bundists.

World War II demonstrated the Americanism of the Jews and tightened bonds with the larger community. A temple plaque lists nine of “our boys” in the armed services: E. E. Farber, Ellis Farber, Dr. H. W. Farber, Morton Farber, Harry Freid, B. H. Josephson, David Kittner, Harry Kittner, and Julius Silvester. Emanuel Farber was killed when his plane crashed during a training exercise. Mutt Farber and Harry Kittner went to the Pacific while Ben Josephson, Harry Freid, and Julius Silvester served in Europe. In 1944, Harry Freid was reported missing after his plane was shot down over Hungary. Townspeople gathered on his parents’ front yard, and every church in town prayed for him. Captured by the Germans, he claimed to be a farm boy, fearing that being a Jew would doom him, but the Germans already had papers identifying him as a “Hebrew.” An airman from Scotland Neck contacted Ellis Farber and wrote letters assuring the anxious parents that their son had survived. Eugene Bloom failed a military physical because of a stomach ailment, but enlisted anyway. He

returned home a war hero. In a battle of the Italian campaign, he found himself alone in a forward position under gun and grenade attack. Dodging enemy fire he returned to his troops, rallied them, and stormed the German position, killing 12 and capturing 60 Nazi soldiers. He received a combat promotion to captain, and by war's end he had earned a Purple Heart, Bronze Star, and Silver Star for bravery. Women joined the home front effort, too. In Jackson Lillian Bloom climbed a watchtower to scan the skies for enemy planes.

Local Jews were certainly aware of the Nazi persecutions but did not know of the death camps. The Holocaust hit home. "The family in America tried to convince the rest of the family to immigrate," Joan Bloom Benas reflected. "My father sent packages all through the war to his family." In 1936 Morris Bloom traveled to Lithuania to bring out his parents, but they would not leave their remaining family. Almost all the relatives who stayed in Europe were killed. In 1944 Louis Kittner received a telegram from the Red Cross informing him that his parents had died. Not until 1946 did a surviving sister in Russia inform the Blooms that their parents had been massacred. In 1958 Bernard Szabo, a Holocaust survivor from the Ukraine, and his family settled in Emporia. He still bore scars from torture and beatings in the labor camps. He was "a great educator," his wife Shirley Szabo recalls. He spoke about the Holocaust, especially to Jewish children, but always on a personal basis, not in public forums. This was an era when victims were unwilling to relive their memories nor was everyone willing to listen. Two Polish Holocaust survivors, brothers Sam and Meyer Scheib, settled in Windsor where they operated a dry-goods store. Sam Scheib had escaped from a concentration camp and found his brother and mother, who were hiding in the forest. Relatives of the Leinwands of Emporia, they joined the community for the High Holidays.

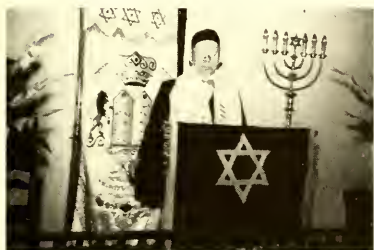
Congregating Jews



Weldon, 1930s



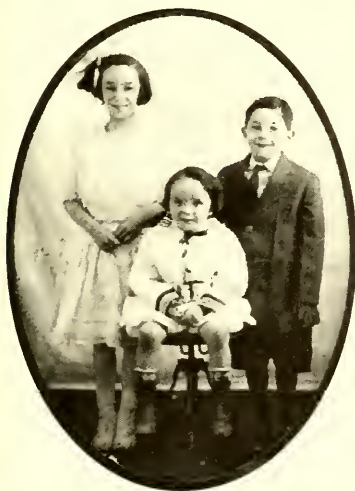
Religious School Children, 1920s



Morris Freid at the Hebrew Center



Seymour Roth, Rabbi and Mrs. Gabriel Maza, Harry Freid, William Farber, Buddy Marks, Mike Josephson, Ida Josephson, Ellis Farber, and "Big Ellis" Farber



Louise, Ellis, and Herman Farber



Postwar Prosperity

The postwar years were prosperous for the downtown merchants. Men home from the service settled down to start families. Harry Kittner graduated from Duke with an engineering degree, but he declined an offer from General Electric since he was “needed” in the store. Julius Silvester returned from the war with a bride, Marion Conston, a German-Jewish woman whom he had met in Paris. He went to work with his Farber cousins. Another veteran, Eugene Bloom, had attended VPI and the University of Richmond, but he, too, went back to the store. Ruth Perman had met her Brooklyn-born husband Hy Diamond at a USO dance in Baltimore, and they took over her father’s store in Warrenton. Mutt Farber went to Wake Forest, but when his mother became ill, he returned to the store. His father died in 1948. “The more I worked, the more I wanted to be part of the store, and I wanted to carry on Poppa’s legacy,” Mutt reflected.

With an improving economy, new families moved into the area. Arthur and Fanny Schwartz opened a dress shop in Roanoke Rapids. Dan Kallman, a veterinarian, settled with his family in Henderson. In Emporia Helen Leinwand took over Omansky’s store, later starting a dress shop. Stanley Schlenker and his wife Ann arrived when he took a managerial position in a textile plant. Ethel Grandis managed a motel and restaurant in Jarrett, Virginia, that was popular with Jews heading between Florida and New York. Dora and Ike Hobowsky had a store in Scotland Neck. Ira Franklin with his wife Leah started a veterinary practice in Emporia.

Jewish dry-goods stores were by now downtown institutions. “We sold to a third generation of people-fathers,

sons, and grandsons,” Morton Farber recalled of his men’s wear customers. Customers and storekeepers knew each other long and warmly. Jews brought a touch of the fashionable, cosmopolitan world to the small-town South. Flo Bloom Interiors set the style for home decor. Kittner’s Department Store proffered merchandise for the entire family from steel-toed boots to underwear to fine suits. Bloom Brothers grew into a chain of eight stores with 200 employees.

Fannye’s dress shop in Roanoke Rapids entered legend. “The store is Fannye’s and Fannye is the store,” the *Sunday Herald* reported. Fannye Marks proudly wore the moniker of “fashion dictator.” Traveling to Paris, London, or New York, she observed high society at opera houses, deluxe hotels, and fine restaurants. Fannye dressed the cream of Virginia and North Carolina society for inaugurations or debutante balls. Her customers included the wives of governors and congressmen, and the trade was by appointment rather than by walk in. Some customers arrived by plane, and she shipped clothes to Europe, Asia, and South America. Prior to the visit, Fanny conducted an interview. “They didn’t go to a rack and pick them out. We chose things for them and put them on,” Robert Liverman explained. The ladies sat in bathrobes in a dressing room where they lunched on steamed hot dogs from a local eatery. Fannye and her sister Marcella Liverman “accessorized” the ladies, draping them in jewelry, scarves, and handbags. Only then did the customers get a first look in the mirror, and only after that did they learn the price. As Richard Allsbrook recalled, if he remarked that a dress looked “nice” on his wife, Fannye would say it looked “fabulous”; if he said that an outfit was “cute,” Fannye would tell him it was “smashing.” Another customer, Lucia Peel Powe, saw “Fannye as a psychiatrist of the first order.”

Harry Freid, who famously mowed his lawn while

wearing a tie, had an eye for high-fashion lines, which he purchased at the Charlotte mart. “If he fell in love with something, he’d sell it,” his daughter Mimi recalled. He greeted a customer at the door, “I know that you’re not going to buy it, and I’m not going to let you buy it, but I just want to see what you think of it.” After trying on the J. G. Hook wool blazer or Misty Harbor raincoat, the customer invariably left a deposit on lay away.

Generations of farmers, many of whom were poor and African American, came into the Bloom store, especially before Christmas and the start of the school year. “Everybody was going up to Mr. Dave and asking him what the best price would be,” his granddaughter Diane recalled. Bloom had a thick accent and a gruff exterior but a soft heart. “He could never turn anyone down,” she remembered. “He would say, ‘You’re killing me, you’re killing me,’ then he would give them a fantastic deal.”

The booming postwar real-estate market created opportunities beyond the store. The construction of a dam in 1956 across the Roanoke River powered industrial development, and Roanoke Rapids grew into the area’s population center. Improvements to route 301 and the construction of Interstate 95 enhanced the accessibility of Emporia, although tourists now bypassed downtown. Hyman Specter gave up retail to become a builder. Nominally a Scotland Neck clothier, Ellis Farber invested in properties. The impoverished agrarian South welcomed industrialists, and Jewish entrepreneurs were granted credit and incentives. In 1960 Bernard Szabo began operations in a former Bloom store in Emporia. With a gift of ten acres of land from the city and low-interest loans from the Blooms and a local bank, he opened the Emporia Garment Factory. Eventually, the Szabos opened factories in Franklin, Virginia, and Roxobel,

North Carolina, growing from six to 600 employees. In the 1960s Murray Levy operated a sewing factory in Weldon. In 1973 Jack Fox, a Baltimore native drawn to Raleigh by a corporate move, purchased a small commercial bakery in Emporia. When he sold the business ten years later, he employed 125.

Adding to community numbers were out-of-town spouses. “If they wanted a Jewish girl, they had to go to the bigger cities and find one,” Ida Kittner recalled. Descended from Hungarian Jews who had settled in Norfolk in the early 1900s, Ida had met Bill Kittner on a blind date in Norfolk. Sarah Kittner was raised in Richmond by Polish immigrants, and she met Harry Kittner through a mutual friend. Richmond was also where Morton Farber met Sophie Abrams. Evelyn Goldblatt, a native Alabamian, had been working in governmental offices in Washington—she was an editor for the Nuremberg papers—when she married Harry Freid. For Jews from cities, small-town life was, as Betty Davis Bloom described it, a “culture shock.” She has been raised among Reform German Jews in Dallas, Texas, but after marrying Eugene Bloom, she felt accepted in Emporia, a community that her husband dearly loved. Maralyn Farber felt that her “Momma never quite got over the fact that she moved to North Carolina. Her heart was really in Richmond, where she had left siblings.” These urban women now found themselves in communities where their social network focused on their spouses’ families. Often they first shared a house with in-laws. “Your whole life was devoted to your family,” Ida Kittner realized in a place without big-city distractions. Mimi Freid Cook observed, “That was probably why the wives were so friendly, were so close.”

Another change from the big city was the extent that local Jews were woven into the social fabric of their hometowns.

When Robert Liverman arrived from Massachusetts in the early 1950s, he felt welcomed as the husband of Marcella Marks, whose family was long settled in Roanoke Rapids. His northern origin and accent were not issues, and their social circle was largely not Jewish. Flo and Harold Bloom were well integrated socially in Roanoke Rapids. Households kept their doors unlocked, and neighborhood kids flowed in and out. “None was more visited than Flo’s home where her love, kindness, gentleness, and peacefulness was ever present,” recalled Richard Allsbrook, a neighbor. Sarah Kittner, too, found an “entirely different experience” when she moved from an exclusively Jewish neighborhood in Richmond to Weldon. In Richmond, she noted, “I didn’t associate that much with non-Jewish people, but in Weldon I became a part of the entire community.”

A core of established, multigenerational families anchored the community, but the newcomers who flowed in and out of town were welcomed. The Levy and Fox families became active in congregational life. Molly Levy served as Sisterhood president, and their children Barry, Marilyn, and Barbara enrolled in Sunday School. Molly Levy’s father made annual fall visits during which he built the community succah. Gil and Aida Lipton settled in Lawrenceville, and the Argentina-born Aida was recalled as one of the congregation’s colorful personalities. The Szabos, who moved next door to the Leinwands, enjoyed meeting families around dinner and Passover tables.

To meet other Jewish kids, children were sent to Jewish summer camps in Maryland, Pennsylvania, or North Carolina. Joan Bloom spent her summers in Norfolk, where she met Jewish boys, including her future husband, Al Benas. “It was an unwritten law that we date and marry within our religion,” she felt. Betty Liverman recalled “heated discussions” as her

parents balanced their Jewish feelings with their daughter's social reality. Although she was permitted to date non-Jewish boys, she never questioned "the expectation that I would marry Jewish." Parents wanted their children to feel part of the Jewish community, but they also did not want them to feel left out of the larger society. This meant constant negotiation and accommodation. "We always celebrated Hanukkah on Christmas eve so when the teacher in school asked, what did you get for Christmas, I could say I received my Hanukkah presents," Harriet Bloom Dickman recalled. On Passover, she was given an Easter basket.

Stores were still, "a big family affair," as Mimi Freid observed. The store was a magical place for children. "We all grew up working in the store," Jody Kittner recalled, and she loved it. As soon as they were old enough, Bloom, Freid, and Kittner children began wrapping gifts, helping customers, and hanging clothes, especially during sale days. Jews looked after each other, and the store provided a place for the elderly to continue useful employment. In her nineties, Lena Liverman hemmed dresses by hand at Fannye's dress shop. When Bill Josephson died, his widow Ida went to work for Harry Freid. Harry, Evelyn, and Phenie Freid also employed their sister Florence Coblenz when her husband Fillmore became ill. The sense that each Jew was responsible for the other was deeply engrained. "They looked after each other," Mimi Freid Cook noted.

Even as new families and elderly relations arrived, youth continued to depart. "I had made up my mind when I left that I was going to study and not fail, because I wasn't coming back to Emporia," Janice Specter Kingoff recalled. "There wasn't that much opportunity in those days." College educated youth abandoned retail trades for the professions. Joan Bloom Benas taught school in Kinston before moving to Virginia Beach.

After attending medical school and marrying, Ben Josephson settled in Springfield, New Jersey, where he was a pediatrician. Evelyn Josephson was vice principal of a Baltimore elementary school. Roland Specter, a building contractor, became the first Jew to be elected mayor of Petersburg.

Family ties meant a two-way traffic of Jews in and out of town. Social columns report visits of local Jews to relatives in Boston, New Bern, Omaha, Norfolk, Richmond, Virginia Beach, Florida, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New York. Children and grandchildren were brought to Emporia to spend a vacation or a summer. Dave Kittner in Philadelphia sent his daughters Harriet and Susan to his parents for holidays and summer vacations so often that they consider Weldon their hometown. Business kept local Jews connected to wholesalers in New York. As a director of the North Carolina Retail Merchants Association, Harry Kittner traveled to meetings across the state. "We lived in a small town, but we weren't isolated," Susan Bloom Farber recalled of her upbringing in Jackson and Weldon. "It wasn't as if we were small-town people that never knew what city life was like," she reflected. Jews were a cosmopolitan people. Several maintained family ties to Israel and South Africa. In 1964 the Kittners received a letter from a niece in Russia who had survived the Holocaust. The family sent her money, which helped her to emigrate to Israel. Dave Kittner visited her in an Israeli hospital before she died.

The Jewish sense of community extended across the region. There were car rides to Virginia Beach where Jewish families vacationed and renewed friendship ties. On Saturdays they headed to Richmond or Norfolk for a dance, New Year's Eve party, or socializing with friends. Buying trips were "a combination break and vacation," Bob Liverman recalled. The drive to New York was an

opportunity to visit family along the way, check into a hotel, dine at a fine restaurant, and catch a Broadway show. Social columns reported European travels and vacations to Florida and New York. So many families took Caribbean cruises that the April, 1967, temple bulletin quipped, “It seems to be contagious, so watch out—you may be the next to go!”

Route 301, a major New York to Florida artery, brought a steady flow of transient Jews to the area. Emporia was a popular stopping point, a day’s drive from New York, and when the weather was bad Jews were often stranded on the road. “The sheriff always brought Jewish people to us,” Janice Specter Kingoff recalled. “And they never brought anybody but Jews.” Her bedroom was turned over to the guests, and she slept on the chaise lounge in her mother’s room. When the travelers returned north months later, grateful for the hospitality, they often stopped by with bags of oranges. When Jews were injured in traffic accidents, the community was notified, and members gathered at the hospital to help them. The merchants were also visited regularly by emissaries from Jewish charitable institutions—better known by the rich Yiddish idiom, *schnorrs* (beggars)—who entered their stores to collect funds for a Brooklyn yeshiva (seminary) or a Jerusalem orphanage. Invariably, the storekeeper reached into his pocket for a donation. Sam Kittner had a childhood memory of a poor “Jewish person who just kind of showed up” at the store needing cash for gas, a meal, or a bus ticket. The vagabond was given money to help him on his way.

Jews were firmly established as middle class. Consistent with national housing trends, local Jews abandoned downtowns for the suburbs just like their northern cousins who were moving to New Jersey and Long Island. In 1954 Morton and Sophie Farber left the Weldon family home at 66 Elm Street and moved into a custom-built house on Country Club Road

in a new, countrified subdivision on a golf course. The Freids soon moved across the street followed by the Kittners down the block. The Szabos moved from a rental house in Emporia to Laurel Street where they joined the Blooms and Leinwands. Jews had left immigrant poverty behind them.



Mike Josephson, Dan Kallman, Harry Vatz, Louis Kittner, William Farber, Joseph Kittner, Hy Diamond



Marcella Liverman, Sophie Farber, Evelyn Freid, Phenie Freid, Ida Kittner



Hanukkah at the Bloom home in Jackson, 1950s



Confirmation of Susan Farber, Harriet Bloom, Rabbi Friedman, Janice Spector, Phyllis Sue Bloom

IV

Building the Temple

In the post-World War II years a religious revival swept America. Nationally, from 1945 to 1956 church and synagogue spending jumped from \$26 million to \$775 million. In North Carolina new temples arose in the nearby towns of Rocky Mount, Wilson, and Kinston. As Ellis Farber observed, "Young members had come back from the war, married, and new families with children were becoming part of our congregation." Families grew concerned for the Jewish education of their youth, and with the booming economy they had the means to realize their ambition to build a synagogue. These new synagogues were conceived as multipurpose, family-oriented community centers. Not only did they provide sanctuaries for worship, but they sheltered Zionist societies, scout troops, Sisterhoods, and, most importantly, religious schools. The State of Israel was established, the crisis of European Jewry was abating, and local needs pressed forward. Another catalyst to building a synagogue was the arrival of Bob Liverman, who, as one rabbi later observed, "brought with him an awareness of a larger Jewish world, how other congregations operate, and a deep and abiding sensitivity to the needs of a small, rural congregation."

The need for a synagogue was apparent. The upstairs rooms were hardly adequate for a growing community, especially for its youth. The rooms were unbearably hot in summer, and a floor fan was now outdated with the advent of air conditioning. The February 26, 1948, minutes report "discussion again" on erecting a building. President Harry Kittner appointed a committee to seek pledges and to explore financing. They were uncertain whether to locate the temple in

Weldon or Roanoke Rapids, and committees were appointed in each town. Two years later, still unable to find a lot, the board decided to improve the HCC rooms. Fanny Roth presented the congregation with a bimah and *Aron Kodesh* (holy ark), and the congregation obtained a second Torah scroll. Mooney Greenberg, a gifted woodworker, renovated the ark. In 1953 a Building Improvement Committee embarked on remodeling. Harold Bloom donated a new *parochet* (ark curtain).

At the October 27, 1952, board meeting, Harry Freid suggested that the HCC invest in a Building & Loan fund for a synagogue “in some future years.” Four months later Bob Liverman called for a Committee to draw plans for financing and securing a lot. Ellis Farber rose and pledged the first month’s payment. He inspired others to make pledges of their own. Max Meyer of Enfield sent a very generous, unsolicited contribution.

By October, 1953, the Building Committee reported that Weldon had no suitable lots. When Bob Liverman suggested also looking in Roanoke Rapids, there were “a few heated words of discussion...pro & con.” Ellis Farber resolved the conflict by inviting the Committee to his home for a Sunday-night meeting. These discussions continued into 1954. Meanwhile, members responded to the financial challenge.

At a February 10, 1954, meeting, Harry Kittner reported that he had found a house on the corner of Sycamore and Eighth Streets in Weldon, which was to be sold at public auction on March 25. He suggested ways that an architect could remodel it into a synagogue. The Building Committee asked to be empowered to bid as high as \$11,000. After “considerable discussion,” the congregation voted 23 yes, with 2 not voting “including two cases where wives opposed their husbands.” Louis Kittner, Harold Bloom, and Hyman Specter were authorized to bid.

On April 6, Louis Kittner reported that the HCC had obtained the building for \$10,000. With a \$5,000 loan from the Bank of Halifax, Harold Bloom purchased the property, and the title was transferred to a trusteeship composed of Louis Kittner, Ellis Farber, and Jacob Spire. Robert Liverman estimated that the total cost, with remodeling, would be \$15-16,000 and called for each member to pay a third of the pledge at once. The congregants answered the call. Twenty-three households made pledges totaling \$15,925, with payments of \$5,400. As is typical with fundraising, \$11,000 came from the nine largest donors.

Bob Liverman engaged an architect, Charles Leavitt of Norfolk, to draw plans for renovation. Leavitt proposed rebuilding the entrance, installing double-hung windows, expanding the kitchen, and refinishing the Aron Kodesh in lime oak. The sanctuary would seat 52. If the folding doors to the buffet room were opened, another 32 could be seated. Plans included a library, meeting room, two classrooms, a lounge and cloakroom. Men controlled the finances, but women oversaw the interior decorating. Fannye Marks chaired a Decorating Committee with Sarah Kittner serving as co-chair.

A new synagogue was also an occasion to rename the congregation. Minnie Josephson submitted several names: Beth Israel, Beth Jacob, Beth Te'filiah, and Beth David. Fannye Marks added Temple Emanuel to the list. At a September meeting the choices were narrowed to Beth David and Temple Emanuel. By a vote of 18 to 10, the Hebrew Community Center became Temple Emanu-El, translated as "God is with us."

With a new synagogue the congregation acquired a new Jewish identity. In 1953, under the leadership of Marcella Liverman, the women formally organized the Sisterhood. In 1954 Temple Emanu-El joined the United Synagogue of

America, the governing body of the Conservative movement. The congregation numbered 28 households with 11 in Weldon, seven in Emporia and Roanoke Rapids, and one in Enfield, Jackson, and Virginia Beach. “We grew shortly after we built our temple,” Bob Liverman recalled as new members joined from Warrenton, Henderson, and Ahoskie. Some families, like the Diamonds in Warrenton and the Kallmans in Henderson, enrolled their children in religious school and became temple stalwarts.

Fundraising continued. In the summer, 1954, the decision was made to raise \$27,500. The donor’s list gave everyone an opportunity to contribute. A library book could be donated for \$5; an altar chair for \$250; a movie and sound projector for \$375; or a Memorial Tablet for \$1000. The synagogue became a keepsake of memories. The Farbers donated a cabinet. The Novey and Bloom families gave a parochet for Stephen Bloom’s bar mitzvah. The members contracted with B. F. Biehl & Sons of New Jersey to make stained glass windows. One window was dedicated to Will Farber while the others were named for Ellis Farber, Mr. and Mrs. J. Spire, S. Roth, S. Marks, The Freid Family, Fannye Marks, and Robert and Marcella Liverman. Mac Bloom purchased a Rosh Hashana window in memory of his wife, Lillian Freid Bloom. Mike and Minnie Josephson donated the *Ner Tamid* (Eternal Light) in memory of her parents, the Joseph Goldsteins. In 1961 silver candelabra were donated in memory of Samuel Bloom and Esther Spire by their children, and three years later the Kittners contributed a Torah mantle to honor the fiftieth anniversary of Louis and Rose Kittner.

On November 14, 1954, the *Herald* reported, “A new temple will be dedicated, and behind that temple and its construction lies a heartwarming story of perseverance,

determination, hard work and the deep desire of a group of people to worship God in fitting surroundings of beauty and holiness.” Church building in the South—synagogues included—was a civic as well as a religious event. In the dedicatory booklet Leon C. Larkin, president of the Roanoke Rapids-Weldon Ministerial Association, welcomed the Temple:

Our civilization owes a debt to the Jews that is beyond human calculation. ...Those of us who represent the Christian Faith are keenly aware of the fact that we are building on a firm foundation laid by the Hebrews of the long ago.

At the dedicatory ceremonies, Rabbi Harold Friedman delivered an invocation followed by words of welcome from Ellis Farber. Rev. John W. Carter, Rector of Grace Episcopal Church, and I. D. Blumenthal, president of the North Carolina Association of Jewish Men, added greetings. Bob Liverman, chair of the building committee, then made a presentation to Temple president Harry Freid. Mike Josephson lit the eternal light. Susan Bloom presented a song, and Bill Josephson read Psalm XXX, for the dedication of the temple. Will Farber, the oldest member, was given the honor of placing the Torah scrolls in the ark. Dr. Murray Kantor, rabbi of Agudath Achim Congregation in Suffolk, delivered the dedicatory address. He noted that this year was the 300th anniversary of Jewish settlement in America. When “the Children of Israel struck the first blow for human liberty by leaving Egypt,” the Rabbi explained, they created a precedent for the religious freedom that Americans enjoy to this very day. He continued:

These ideals [that] motivated the refugees in New Amsterdam [are] the self-same ideals [that] motivate Jewry in Weldon, Roanoke Rapids, and surrounding communities, as evidenced by the Midrashic quotation inscribed over the “Oron Kodesh” (Holy Ark) in this newly dedicated Temple Emanu-El—KNOW BEFORE WHOM THOU STANDEST!

For the dedicatory book members solicited friends and businesses, both Jewish and non-Jewish, as well as their suppliers and manufacturers in Norfolk, Richmond, and Baltimore. The donors ranged from Orkin Exterminators to Sisisky’s Kosher Delicatessen. Real-estate auctioneer Ike Rochelle sent “Congratulations To My Jewish Friends” while the Herald Printing Company observed, “One of the Noblest Acts of Mankind Is the Building of a Temple Dedicated to the Worship of God.” I. D. Blumenthal of Charlotte was so impressed with the ceremony that he sent an unsolicited \$350 donation.

The community looked optimistically toward the Jewish future. In September, 1959, Louis Kittner was appointed chairman of a Mortgage-Burning Committee. Members “heartily” favored expanding the synagogue and enlarging the property. Outside lights were installed to illumine the windows. In 1960 the Sisterhood refurbished the kitchen, and a year later purchased new silver and china. With the mortgage reduced, Mike Josephson suggested expansion.

Circuit Riding Rabbis

While the community busied itself with the synagogue, I. D. Blumenthal, the visionary Charlotte philanthropist, was concerned. In an August 13, 1954, letter to Harry Kittner,

Blumenthal noted an “enthusiastic response” when he had proposed endowing a circuit-riding rabbi to serve rural communities. He was impressed that 30 families—100 percent of the Jews of Weldon, Roanoke Rapids, Jackson, Enfield, Scotland Neck, and Emporia—were members of the North Carolina Association of Jewish Men. “I have faith in my people,” Blumenthal wrote. The members endorsed the project but, after the purchase of a synagogue, were reluctant to make another financial commitment.

“Call another meeting,” Blumenthal urged, “let each man say what he will give.” A building was insufficient, he argued. “You must include God in your plans if you propose to serve Him and do His will.” Blumenthal outlined his vision: “The rabbi will teach the children during the entire afternoon... In the evening there will be a religious service, after which the entire evening will be devoted to an adult educational program... The rabbi will install a Sunday school system and train some local lay people... The rabbi will also be available to speak at any civic affair or before groups in any of the towns affiliated with you.”

Robert Liverman responded that 14 people were willing to pledge \$60 a year, and Blumenthal wrote circuit-riding rabbi Harold Friedman that he “personally” wanted him to include Weldon-Roanoke Rapids. The community was the tenth on a circuit that extended from Hendersonville to Jacksonville. In March 1955, at Charlotte’s Amity Club, Dr. Abram L. Sachar, president of Brandeis University, dedicated the world’s only traveling synagogue, a bus outfitted as a shul. Dr. Sachar noted that, ever since Jews carried the ark in the desert, Judaism had been an “ambulatory religion.” The project inspired efforts to construct synagogues in Hickory, Lumberton, and Jacksonville.

The first circuit rider, Rabbi Harold Friedman, was a

37-year-old Pennsylvanian, with Conservative ordination, who had worked in all three movements. The Friedmans first settled in Statesville, splitting the circuit so that he visited each community every two weeks. When the Rabbi came, he held confirmation classes, Sunday Schools, and a Men's Bible Class. He met with the congregational president, visited the sick, taught the children in the afternoon, and led a service and an adult class in the evening. Rebbetzin Miriam Friedman recalled at Temple Emanu-El "there was a mix of people leaning toward tradition, what they called Orthodoxy, and very little Reform. My husband was able to find a common denominator. People were eager to learn. The old timers were literate in Hebrew." The religion practiced was "liberal Judaism." Although women were not yet accepted into the minyan, the rebbetzin played a religious role, especially with the Sisterhood. Miriam Friedman was a professional educator with a background in music. A native of Vienna, who had fled to Palestine a year after the Nazi invasion, she had met her husband in Israel where he was studying the Dead Sea Scrolls. In 1955 Liverman wrote to Blumenthal noting that the Friedmans "have impressed most favorably by their personalities and charms," and the congregation has shown a "marked increase in the interest and enthusiasm." Janice Specter Kingoff remembers the Rabbi fondly: "I really did adore him; he was a good teacher." Miriam Friedman described Temple Emanu-El as "one of their favorite congregations" and found that the members were "appreciative and have cooperated fully."

Changing Traditions

In October, 1956, the Religious Committee recommended that instrumental music be used during Sabbath services. The vote was four to one with Louis Kittner dissenting. Guiding the

Committee was a 1955 statement from the United Synagogue of America that “took no formal stand” on music in worship.

Temple Emanu-El was hardly the first congregation riven by the question of instrumental music, a ban that dates to the destruction of the Second Temple in Roman times. Indeed, as early as 1841 the installation of an organ had torn apart Charleston’s Beth Elohim congregation, and in 1869 the Washington Hebrew Congregation broke in two over the issue. Reform temples typically installed organs as did some Conservative synagogues. Tarboro’s congregation mired in controversy after purchasing an organ, which was eventually given to a church.

The “preference of the overwhelming majority,” the Committee reported, “felt the use of the piano would enhance the beauty and form of the Friday evening service.” As Janice Specter Kingoff recalled, “Nobody could carry a tune.” Louise Farber, head of the Music Committee, was a piano teacher who served as President of Weldon’s Music Club. She was “the driving force” behind bringing music into the service. In June, 1956, Fannye Marks asked if the congregation was willing to accept a piano or an organ, which was eventually donated by Jacob and Rose Spire.

On March 3, 1957, Rabbi Simcha Kling of Beth David Synagogue in Greensboro, president of the North Carolina Association of Rabbis, mediated at an open meeting. He noted that the written law did not forbid instrumental music on the Sabbath, but that “thousands of years” of custom gave it the force of law. The Advisory Board of the North Carolina Association of Rabbis stated that “the primary factor in answering this question is the preservation of the unity of the congregation.”

A motion to reaffirm piano playing passed, 24 to 2. Rabbi Kling wrote to Louis Kittner explaining that although

“our East European tradition definitely disapproved,...it is not against the *din* (rabbinic court).” The Rabbi called for “brotherhood and peace,” noting that “dissension and unhappiness” is a “far greater *avayra* (sin) than the use of the piano.” I. D. Blumenthal wrote that Charlotte’s Conservative synagogue employed an organ and choir on Friday nights, but not on Saturday mornings when services were Orthodox. With the founding of Israel, Rabbi Friedman wrote, there was no need to continue mourning the Temple’s fall.

Behind the piano controversy were generational changes that were transforming American Jewry. Rabbi Friedman noted that no member was actually Orthodox. The immigrant generation, raised in traditional Judaism, was aging and dying. The conflict rending Temple Emanu-El was typical of symbolic struggles being waged in synagogues across the country not only over music in the service but on such issues as women’s participation and English worship. There were “rifts over how *frum* (observant) they were going to be,” Betty Liverman recalled, “but things would blow over.”

Jews were inventing a distinctly American Judaism. Jews were inconsistent in their religious behavior, and traditional practices like *kashruth* and Sabbath observance continued to erode. Ellis Farber donned his father’s *tefillin* (phylacteries) and prayed three times daily, but he worked on the Sabbath and did not keep kosher. Inhibitions about eating ham and pork endured among many although seafood was less resistible. Harry and Evelyn Freid kept two sets of dishes and had meat shipped from Baltimore and Washington for several years after they married, but they eventually decided to “just give it up.” Several families kept kosher until an elder passed away. The temple owned separate milk and meat dishes, and kosher products were used when available.

Jews continued to negotiate between their Jewish loyalties

and their social reality. For the extended Freid family, Danny Coblenz recalled, the busy Christmas season made it difficult for the scattered family to join together on Hanukkah. Their tradition was to gather on Christmas Day to exchange gifts. Bari Novey recalled how his parents waited until after the rabbi departed from his bar-mitzvah lessons before they set up a tree. He reflected, "My parents wanted us to feel we were just like the other kids." The rabbi stayed with the Blooms in Emporia to tutor Stephen, but since they were not kosher, they served him on glass plates. Conservative rabbis had difficulties since visiting the elderly or sick required driving a car on the Sabbath.

Finding a circuit-riding rabbi, someone who was willing to travel far from Jewish centers and adapt to small-town Judaism, was a challenge. "The children's education could be hit or miss depending on the circuit rider," Bert Kittner observed. After Rabbi Friedman left for Sarasota, he was succeeded by Rabbi Eli Gottesman, whose last pulpit had been Austin, Texas, but his tenure was short. The congregation repeatedly debated whether to hire a full-time rabbi or a part-time rabbi who could be shared with other communities. From January to June 1963, Rabbi Tolochoko of Temple Israel in Kinston came twice monthly, and he implemented an Audio Visual Aid service.

Among the circuit riders, Dr. William B. Furie was a dedicated teacher who left a lasting influence on children and adults alike. A professional educator without rabbinic ordination, Dr. Furie innovated, introducing the bat-mitzvah ceremony for girls. A man of "keen intellect and well-chosen words," Dr. Furie reached out to the Christian community. In 1966 he spoke on "restoring Christ to Christmas" at the Main Street Baptist Church in Emporia. When Dr. Furie retired in 1968, the community held a testimonial dinner at Howard

Bloom's restaurant in Roanoke Rapids. Ellis Farber praised him as a "spiritual and education leader who has given so much of his experience, knowledge, and dedication to so many of our congregants, both young and old."

After Dr. Furie, the rabbinic turnover was rapid. Rabbi Reuben Kessner, who served the Southern Circuit, filled in. The Northeastern Rabbi Circuit Project, headquartered in Rocky Mount, included Wilson, Wallace, Weldon, and Rocky Mount. Rabbi Harry Lawrence, ordained at a Lubavitch yeshiva, had served congregations from Mexico City to Seattle. His Orthodoxy, however, was not well suited for the compromises of small-town life. In 1971, the newsletter, *The Voice of the Circuit Riding Rabbi*, introduced the community to Rabbi Philip Fried. The Rabbi, a trained mohel, had served in Raleigh and Fayetteville. Within months Rabbi Fried resigned, explaining that as an Orthodox Jew he could not serve a small town where Jews might hold a service even when lacking 10 worshipers. His successor, Rabbi William Greenebaum II, was a Philadelphian who had served as an Air Force Chaplain. With a background in human and interfaith relations, Rabbi Greenebaum was more accommodating. "I believe in a liberal, viable, practical Jewish theology, through which we may relate to the 'God of our fathers' out of our contemporary context and needs," he explained.

In addition to the circuit rider, visiting rabbis continued to serve the Temple for the High Holidays. First, Bob Liverman recalled, he worked with the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary and later with the Reform Union of American Hebrew Congregations. For two years, Rabbi Gabriel Maza served the congregation, but unable to come one year, he recommended his brother Jack. Bob Liverman phoned him, but he kept getting the rabbis' mother, who told him in a thick accent that her son Jackie was working the

Borscht Belt. Bob Liverman assumed that he had rabbinic duties there, not knowing that he was already embarked on his comic shtick as Jackie Mason. Many Emanu-El members recall the chazzan more for his humor than for his skills as a cantor. “Everyone told him he should have been a comedian,” Bob Liverman recalls.

On Friday nights 30 or 40 people attended services, some taking an hour or so to drive from Enfield or Warrenton. “Uncle Will” Farber, as the most Jewishly learned member, continued as lay prayer leader. As Bob Liverman noted, Uncle Will was willing to “modernize somewhat” so that more could participate. The congregation adopted the Conservative Silverman *siddur* (Sabbath prayer book), which included bilingual English and Hebrew prayers. Ellis Farber spoke on the weekly Torah reading and delivered the announcements, keeping the community up-to-date on the ill and local events. Especially cordial were his greetings to newcomers and returnees visiting home. “He had a way of making everyone feel so special when they visited the Temple,” Bert Kittner reflected. Louise Farber concluded the service with a piano rendition of Ein Kelohenu. Louis Kittner led the Kiddush, reciting the blessings with great emotion in his Polish-inflected Hebrew. After the eight o’clock service, the Sisterhood prepared an oneg, a social hour with coffee, refreshments, and, most importantly, chatting. Friends greeted each other with a buss on the cheek—particularly Ellis!—and members referred to themselves as a “kissing congregation.”

As Uncle Will’s health declined, Louis Kittner as the community elder took over. Bob Liverman, wanting a more streamlined, participatory service, bought a record of a Conservative prayer service. “I sat for hours with that record and that prayer book, and I learned how to chant the

service,” he recalled. One Friday night, he stepped forward and for decades thereafter served as lay prayer leader. Ellis Farber continued his sermons and Torah lessons until his death in 1998.

Synagogue leadership was do it yourself. “We never had elections,” Bob Liverman recalled. “After a while, we all served as president.” Presidents included Ellis Farber, Morton Farber, Mike Josephson, Bill Kittner, Harry Kittner, Louis Kittner, Harry Freid, and Robert Liverman. Ellis Farber, anointed “Moses,” was “president of the shul basically forever,” Maralyn Farber recalled. Mindful of his father’s legacy, Ellis was the keeper of tradition. Ellis was, as Joan Bloom Benas recalled him, “the spokesman of the community and the glue that kept us together. He was always happy to see everyone.”

Sisterhood was “the heart and soul of the congregation,” Sarah Kittner recalled. The women formed a friendship circle. They outfitted the kitchen and hosted community suppers. Marcella Liverman was a longtime president, and for years treasurer Jeanette Marks managed the books, collecting cash at synagogue benefits. The fundraising totaled in the thousands. The women took turns preparing the Oneg Shabbats and Yom Kippur break-the-fasts, bringing specialties from their own kitchens. “Everybody pitched in,” Sarah recalled, as women prepared *kugel* (potato pudding) and jello molds. Members gathered for Eveyln Freid’s coffee punch. Fanny Roth’s housekeeper Easter, who prepared the food, was such a constant Temple presence as to be practically a member. Easter’s brownies were much anticipated.

Jewish children, whose numbers were few, were kept bonded and involved. “Every Sunday,” Bari Novey recalled, “my daddy or my uncle would drive a car load of us over [from Emporia] and it would be my sister, myself, and my

cousin and his sister.” Later, other kids joined them, and fathers took turns carpooling. “It was fun,” he remembered. “Everybody was warm. You felt you were family. They were all lovely people.” To induce his daughter Diane to come, Eugene Bloom stopped for hot dogs at a Stuckey’s between the two towns. The Diamonds drove their children Helen and Lee Friday nights and Sunday mornings almost 40 miles from Warrenton. “We used to say our station wagon goes by itself,” Ruth Diamond recalled. Aida Lipton drove her children from Lawrenceville while her husband Gil paddled the last leg by kayak down the Roanoke River.

Community elders served as religious schoolteachers, and, with the rapid turnover of rabbis, Jewish education could be “spotty,” as Betty Liverman recalled. Although Betty did not learn Hebrew, Rabbi Friedman instilled in her the “joy of Judaism.” Community members set an example. Betty felt “a sense of wonder” at how “Grandfather Kittner and Uncle Will” knew all that they did. “Their piety, their devotion, and their ability to practice something that they believed in a lot” inspired her. At the Temple she saw her own father evolve into a ritually observant Jew.

The climax of the children’s educational program was Confirmation at Shavuoth. A formal program was printed, and the confirmands, the boys in suits and the girls clutching bouquets to their white dresses, participated in a solemn ceremony that included musical selections from Bach and Handel as well as Hebrew liturgical melodies. A 1963 ceremony featured a presentation on “The Journey of Life.” Each confirmand offered “Guidance for The Journey.” According to Barry Levy, “The Road Map” was drawn in “Jewish Literature.” Stephen Bloom described “The Synagogue” as “the Service Station” where one refueled. For “The Equipment and Tools for the Journey,” Patricia

Novey described the “The Home,” and Lee Diamond spoke of “Society.” Nancy Liverman concluded with “The Passengers: Our People Through History and We Today.” Circuit-rider Dr. Furie sermonized on “Beginning of the Journey,” and the boys and girls recited the Confirmation vow. The confirmands marched out in a recessional.

The social calendar brought the community together. That was especially important for a congregation whose members came from some 14 communities across two states. “Friends and relatives came from far and near,” the Temple bulletin observed of Ben Kittner’s 1967 bar mitzvah. After services, a luncheon and dance was held in the Rebel Room of the Dixie Motel. For Stephen Bloom’s bar mitzvah, the family rented a hotel to accommodate out-of-town guests. Mark and Jimmy Farber, although raised in Petersburg, returned to Temple Emanu-El for their bar mitzvah. A 1967 bulletin spoke of the High Holidays as a “Homecoming.” When Lil and Jack Weissner arrived from Florida, the bulletin noted that “it is good to have members come back and visit.” They “were an integral part of our community when they lived here and will always be welcome in our midst.” At the 75th anniversary in 1987, Ellis Farber noted that “many of our young adults have left our communities for larger cities. We are proud of them as they come back on Holy Days, remembering from ‘whence they come,’ contributing in many ways to continue and maintain a Jewish way of life among our communities.”

Holidays were community events. After Rosh Hashana services all gathered at the Holiday Inn for a dairy meal of kugel, salad, sweets, smoked salmon, bagels and cream cheese. The Inn’s restaurant was operated by Howard Bloom, who was well versed in the Jewish culinary arts. In 1954, at Passover, the congregation held its first community seder,

an annual tradition that endured for a half century. After a meal prepared by Sisterhood, the celebrants sang traditional Hebrew melodies, using a transliterated song sheet, as well as the African-American spiritual “Let My People Go,” a “Ballad of the Four Sons” to the melody of Clementine, and a Farewell blessing composed by Louise Farber. In 1955 the Sisterhood hosted its first anniversary dinner at the Temple, an event that also became a tradition. Rabbi Paul Reich of Congregation Beth El in Norfolk spoke to 75. A year later 90 members and friends sat down to a roast beef dinner to hear Rabbi Jacob Milgrom of Temple Beth-El in Richmond explain the role of today’s Jews in American history.

Perhaps the most memorable of these events was the congregation’s 50th anniversary in 1962. At the Temple, Dr. William Furie sermonized on the text, “And they shall build for me a sanctuary, and I will dwell in their midst.” The ceremony included a children’s service, a burning of the Temple’s mortgage, and a pageant, “Jubilee Gems,” narrated by Evelyn Freid and Marcella Liverman. Sunday evening the Sisterhood sponsored a dinner and dance, under the auspices of a Jewish caterer—all for \$6 a person--in the Confederate Room of the Rebel Restaurant in Roanoke Rapids. Lou Saks and his Society Orchestra from Norfolk entertained the celebrants with swing, twist, waltz, cha-cha, and kazatski. The *Roanoke Rapids Daily Herald* featured the anniversary on its front page.

The annual Purim spiels were also raucous community affairs. One memorable edition was Evelyn Freid and Sarah Kittner’s play “The Great Robbery at Goldfarber’s Gulch.” Like many American congregations, the Temple produced a popular cantata, “What Is Torah,” that proclaimed Judaism’s universal values. Torah was more than a “scroll,” a “law” or a “story”; it was a “people on the march...Israel’s gift

to humanity...the hope of the Negro people....” Jews emphasized the harmony of Jewish and American values as safeguards of freedom and human dignity.

For the Temple’s bar mitzvah in 1967, I. D. Blumenthal, board chairman of the North Carolina Association of Jewish Men, sent a warm letter repeating what he had said “many times”: “Temple Emanu-El occupies a special place in my heart, not only for the warmth of personal friendships in your congregation but for the sincere and loyal devotion to Judaism and its teachings that is characteristic of the entire membership.” At the dinner the congregation sang songs that affirmed their multicultural identity: “Hail, hail, the gang’s all here,” the Hebrew “Hevenu Shalom Aleichem,” the Yiddish “Bei Mir Bistu Shane,” the African-American “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands,” and, at the end, the Israeli anthem, “Hatvikoh.” One highlight was a rendition of “Hello Dolly” as “Hello Ellis” in honor of the community patriarch, now 62, who himself was always quick with a joke:

“You’re looking swell, Ellis

We can tell, Ellis

You’re still glowin’, you’re still crowin’, you’re still going strong.”

To expand membership, in December, 1964, an associate membership category was created to encourage affiliation by former members and non-residents. In 1967 Temple Emanu-El claimed 34 full members and 33 associates. Full members came from seven communities: Clemmons, Emporia, Jarrett, Roanoke Rapids, Scotland Neck, Warrenton, and Weldon. The associate members included friends and former residents extending from Massachusetts to Nebraska.

Another milestone was the consecration of a Jewish burial ground. Typically in Jewish communities, a cemetery precedes the organizing of a congregation, but local Jews

had been more focused on building community and keeping their youth in the Jewish fold. Their dead were sent to Jewish cemeteries out of town. A cemetery, like the building of a synagogue, declared that Jews felt themselves permanently rooted in the community. In 1969 Robert Liverman went before the Roanoke Rapids town council, which agreed to sell a section of the public Cedarwood Cemetery. He then went to New York and met with Rabbi Benjamin Kreitman of the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards. Since Cedarwood did not permit fences, a cement border delineated the Jewish section. In October, 1969, Rabbi Harry Lawrence presided at the dedication, which was attended by Mayor Kirkwood Adams of Roanoke Rapids.

Jewish Connections

"Jewish people want to be connected," Harry Kittner recognized. Despite their distance from Jewish centers, local Jews through their philanthropic and Zionist endeavors felt themselves members of the global Jewish community with whom they shared bonds of heritage and destiny. Organizations like the North Carolina Association of Jewish Women, founded by Sarah Einstein Weil of Goldsboro in 1921, linked isolated Jews to a statewide community. The NCAJW provided college scholarships for Jewish youth and training programs for Sunday School teachers. In 1937 its membership included five women from Roanoke Rapids, ten from Weldon, four from Enfield, two from Ahoskie, and one from Scotland Neck. Together with B'nai B'rith, the NCAJW helped create the North Carolina Hillel Foundation in Chapel Hill. A district meeting in Weldon drew the social-justice advocate Gertrude Weil of Goldsboro, a woman, Harry Kittner recalled, who "was always held in awe." Women met at a member's home, leaving men to wait

outside on the porch. The NCAJW spawned a men's auxiliary, and Ellis Farber served as its president in 1970. The NCAJW and NCAJM joined to help create the Blumenthal Home for the Jewish Aged in Clemmons. In 1967 Philip Klutznick, former United Nations ambassador and B'nai B'rith president, dedicated the home. Several local Jews, including Rose Spire and Fillmore Coblenz, who suffered from multiple sclerosis, resided there. The widowed Florence Freid Coblenz later moved there herself.

B'nai B'rith Lodges created a statewide network. After World War II, local Jews joined with those in Rocky Mount to form the Eli Epstein-Bobby Rosenbloom Lodge No. 1520. Its 1956 installation was held at Temple Emanu-El with Seymour Roth succeeding Bob Liverman as president and Bill Kittner serving as secretary. Bob Liverman served as state B'nai B'rith president in 1957. A highlight for local Jews was the annual B'nai B'rith Institute held at the Blumenthal's Wildacres retreat in Little Switzerland, which drew Jews from across the South. Families bonded and looked forward yearly to renewing friendships. That was especially important for those from small towns. "It was nice to be with other Jews," Ruth Diamond recalled. "My son said that he didn't know that there were so many Jews in the world!" Children enjoyed Jewish communal living. The intense experience of communal prayer and mountain beauty was an enduring memory. "It was just a wonderful family experience for us," Shirley Szabo remembered. She holds memories of her daughter Valerie singing "Sunrise, Sunset" to the assembled community.

Parents worked to strengthen their children's Jewish associations, with the hope that they would meet Jewish spouses. Youth groups connected Jewish children to their peers across the state and region. Parents were happy to drive two hours on a Sunday afternoon so that their children

could attend an Aleph Zadik Aleph fraternity, B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, or North Carolina Association of Jewish Youth meeting in Kinston, Wilson, or New Bern. The Shalom chapter of BBYO created a friendship circle that included Enfield, Kinston, Goldsboro, Weldon, Wilson, and Rocky Mount. Chapter leaders went to state conventions in Asheville, Charlotte, Durham, or Greensboro. "BBYO was a critical linchpin in forming my Jewish identity," Bert Kittner observed. Her family and Temple Emanu-El gave her "my love of Judaism," but BBYO inspired her feelings for Israel and bonded her to the Jewish people. The Kittner children served as BBYO state officers with Jody serving as a B'nai B'rith Girls president and Bert rising to the presidency of the Virginia-North Carolina region. Betty Kittner was awarded a scholarship to spend a summer in Israel. "Experiencing Israel with other Jewish youth from throughout the South was a wonderful experience and one of which I am very proud," Betty recalls.

Like BBYO, summer camps linked small-town Jews to the larger Jewish world and set them on a lifelong course of Jewish activism. Near Hendersonville was the popular Blue Star camp as well as a Young Judea camp. Other children were sent to Jewish camps in Maryland or Pennsylvania. "By the time you went to Carolina," Ben Kittner recalled, "you knew half the Jewish student body." Jewish kids they met at camp, Wildacres, or BBYO conventions became classmates, fraternity brothers, or sorority sisters. At her brother Henry's fraternity house, Maralyn Farber found TEP brothers to date. Childhood networking created relationships that lasted into adult years.

The community affirmed its membership in the larger Jewish community in its ardent Zionism. In 1948, with the founding of Israel, Henry Farber raised more than \$8,000 from

local Jews and Christians for the fledgling state. Through the local B'nai B'rith, Mike Josephson raised money to purchase a jeep and have it transported to Israel. The community was part of the Seaboard Region of the United Jewish Appeal, but as was usual did things its own way. "We had a UJA campaign, so to speak," Bob Liverman recalled. Eugene Bloom headed the campaign for 25 years. Several women, notably Evelyn Freid and Sarah Kittner, affiliated with the Raleigh chapter of Hadassah, the women's Zionist organization.

Israel's victory in the Six Day War of 1967 aroused Jews locally no less than it did nationally. Dr. Furie delivered a High Holiday Message that year that expressed Jewish pride: "The State of Israel rose to miraculous heights when challenged during 5727; American Jewry met the hour of destiny with glory and nobility." In Warrenton Hy Diamond solicited contributions from Christians. Families traveled to Israel where they witnessed the fruits of their philanthropy. In 1972 nine local Jews joined a B'nai B'rith tour of the Jewish state. Discussing his Holy Land trip with a reporter, Dave Bloom emphasized that he and his brother Morris had visited places where Jesus had walked. When national campaigns were launched to free Soviet Jewry, Temple Emanu-El adopted a Refusenik family in response to an appeal from the Washington Committee for Soviet Jewry, "Help Us Bring a Miracle!" George Kuna and Elena Keiss-Kuna of Leningrad were engineers who had lost their jobs for applying to emigrate.

Community Life

What persisted through the years were tight family and friendship bonds. Families gathered on Friday nights for Shabbat dinner. The extended Freid family's traditional meal

was Florence Coblenz's slaw, fried flounder, stewed tomatoes, and lima beans. Their long-time housekeeper, Dell, braided the challah. The Kittner families lit Shabbat candles and then gathered at their grandparents for dinner. Bert Kittner recalled standing with her grandmother Rose in the kitchen, learning to braid challah and helping her chop the gefilte fish. After Shabbat dinner, families headed to Temple.

On holidays homes were crowded with out of towners. Before dispersing to the suburbs, the Weldon families lived within walking distance of the Temple. Although they rode on Sabbath, for holidays families walked to the Temple, as did some out-of-town families who parked blocks from the Temple. During the break in services, Jody Kittner Laibstain remembered, families gathered for lunch, "so you would see groups of Jewish people walking down Washington Avenue going to their grandparents' house." While the kids played on the porch, writing songs and planning skits to entertain the guests, Rose Kittner prepared mountains of herring and chopped liver.

Children were raised by the community. "You didn't misbehave because you didn't do that to your parents," Harriet Bloom Dickman reflected. "There was no sassiness, no talking back, or 'I don't want to do it,'" Janice Specter Kingoff recalled. As a child, Ben Marks, the only Jewish boy in Roanoke Rapids, loved attending Temple where he could play with his pal Howard Bloom, the only Jewish boy in Jackson. Parents recognized the importance of bonding Jewish children who were sprawled 30 miles across a dozen communities. Children were packed on a bus or train to join cousins and grandparents in Norfolk, Baltimore, or Richmond. Families vacationed in Virginia Beach and traveled to Nag's Head for family reunions.

To live Jewishly in the small, isolated towns meant

maintaining links to Richmond, Raleigh, Norfolk, and Baltimore. Trips to a doctor or a hospital in Richmond or Petersburg were an opportunity to visit family, shop at Thalhimer's Department Store, and indulge in genuine Jewish deli. "I would have corned beef on white bread with mayonnaise," Maralyn Farber recalled. "I just didn't know the whole shtick about rye bread." When she returned from Richmond with sandwiches, she would meet Ben Kittner in the school cafeteria to share. "He would really get excited," Maralyn recalled. "Corned beef was in a sense symbolic of the longing" to live in the Jewish urban world.

As the immigrant generation aged, elders made homes with their children, and three generations might live under one roof. Two sisters, Lena Liverman and Ida Jerrett, moved to Roanoke Rapids from Boston to be near Lena's son Bob. Ida Josephson, a widow, was joined by her sister Sarah Rosenfeld. Will, Ellis, and Louise Farber shared the family home on Weldon's Elm Street. In 1972 Sarah Kittner brought her father, Louis Kornblau, from Richmond to live with them in Weldon. All became congregational pillars and rarely missed a Friday night. Louis Kornblau led the congregation's Hallel prayers. Ida Jerrett learned Hebrew and had a bat mitzvah at 92, which drew front-page headlines in the *Sunday Herald*. In her bat-mitzvah speech, the nonagenarian described herself as "a late bloomer."

Jews in small towns, studies have shown, often have richer Jewish lives than Jews in larger cities. Susan Bloom Farber echoed a common sentiment when she noted that northern Jews "take their Jewishness for granted. I think that I probably have more of a sense of being Jewish because we had to." As Betty Bloom put it, "If you want to stay with the Jewish tradition, you have to do it yourself." After arriving from Massachusetts in the 1950s, Bob Liverman noticed, "My life

religiously was much richer after I moved to Roanoke Rapids than it ever had been...because of the small numbers.” In his native Baltimore Jack Fox felt like a “spectator” at his 1,700 member synagogue, but at Temple Emanu-El he and his wife Beverly felt that “you made it happen.” In small towns, individuals take responsibility for group survival, and no one can break away to another congregation or form one’s own. The disputes were family quarrels. “The old timers, one family was always mad with another,” Harry Freid recalled, but never for long. “Oh, they got along beautifully,” he reflected. “In times of trouble everybody came together.” The religious fervor of living in the Christian South strengthened Jewish feelings. “Religion is embedded in my soul,” Harry Freid told a newspaper reporter. “It means everything, because it’s always given me a good life, don’t you see?”



Rabbi Harold Friedman, back row, third from right, with congregants, 1950s



Bat Mitzvah of Ida Jerrett with Rabbi Jan Kaufman and Robert Liverman



Dr. William Furie with confirmants Barry Levy, Nancy Liverman, Patricia Novey, Stephen Bloom, and Lee Diamond



Religious school children, 1960s

V

Citizens and Neighbors

The Jews of southeastern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina speak warmly of their hometowns. Bari Novey expressed a common view in observing that he “never had any problems being Jewish. The Christians accepted us for what we were.” Growing up in the lone Jewish family in Jackson, Susan Bloom felt that she lived an “idyllic life.” She, too, spoke for many in remarking, “I never knew any anti-Semitism.” Yet, Jews were still seen as different, and the lack of *outright* discrimination did not preclude incidents or undercurrents of prejudice. Harry Freid felt close to his neighbors, but he sensed “there’s still a point you realize that you aren’t fully accepted by the Christians. I felt more comfortable with Jews.” That was especially true of the immigrant generation.

In a small Southern community, church membership established one’s identity and friendship circle. Ida Kittner observed, “When it came to social time, theirs was mostly with the church as ours would be with the synagogue.” When Jack and Beverly Fox first arrived in Emporia, a builder gave them a tour of prospective homes. They were stunned when the man asked, “What religion are you?” Jack Fox thought, “Here it comes.” When he replied that they were Jews, the builder told him, “Well, that’s wonderful. You’ll be very pleased at the wonderful Jewish families we have here.” As Laverne Cohen observed, newcomers were frequently asked, “ ‘Are you a believer, do you go to church?’ Once I told them that I was Jewish, and, yes, I was active with Temple Emanu-El, that satisfied them.” Bob Liverman expressed a sentiment often heard among Southern Jews: it’s “important

among your Christian friends to be active in the Jewish community. They respect you that much more.”

In Emporia and Roanoke Rapids, where Jews were fewer, they mixed easily in non-Jewish social circles. “We didn’t have our own community, and most of the Jews there fit in,” Lyn Szabo Green observed. “They assimilated.” As a very small minority, Diane Bloom McCabe did not feel that Jews had much choice: “You were ‘in’ whether you wanted to be or not.” In Weldon, where there was a critical mass of Jews who were also linked by kinship, the families “fit in” but tended to be more clannish.

“Fitting in” meant making daily accommodations. As Maralyn Farber observed, “We wanted people to think that we were just like them.” School days began with prayers and Bible readings. “I know the Hallelujah chorus beautifully,” Harriet Bloom recalled. As students, Jews sang Christian hymns and carols but mouthed silently when the lyrics came to Jesus. Even the Boy Scouts had a Christian tone. “You just learned to accept it,” Bill Kittner added. Jewish Scouts recited their own pledge “to be a good Scout, a good Jew, and a good American at all times.”

All Jews recall close Christian friends, some dating to childhood. Betty Bloom, who moved to Emporia after marrying Eugene in 1944, recalled, “We had gobs of friends, we partied together...there was no distinction there.” Lifelong experiences bound Jews and Christians. When the Warrenton Methodist Church held an ecumenical seder to honor Ruth Diamond, the pastor noted, “Ruth put up with us because she is our friend. She has attended our weddings, funerals, christenings, and baptisms; she has participated in all of the celebrations and memorials that are important to us.”

Jewish merchants joined breakfast and luncheon circles where they met with cronies for small-town talk. Ellis Farber

held court at Scotland Neck's Idle Hour Café. Bill Kittner, a Korean War veteran, enjoyed a movable breakfast club that endured for some 30 years, starting downtown at a Roses' counter, then at a bank board room, and finally at a drugstore. The group, which included Baptist and Methodist ministers, talked "sports, a little politics, maybe once in a while a little religion." Kittner earned the moniker of "rabbi."

Sports also wove Jews into their town's social fabric. Since high school, Eugene Bloom was a baseball fan and player, who, in the late 1940s, founded and managed the Washington Senators farm team, the Emporia Nationals. Later he helped start a Babe Ruth League team. In Roanoke Rapids any farm-league ballplayer who hit a homerun won a free shirt at Harold Bloom's Department Store. Bill Kittner played on the Baptist church softball team. Like other Southerners, Jews enjoyed golf and fishing. Dave Bloom kept a pole in his car, and, if a customer reported the fish were biting, off he went. Jews, too, were avid sports fans, and for most the UNC Tar Heels were the team of choice. In the back of their stores the Kittners kept a television tuned to basketball games, updating customers with scores.

Jews were the most numerous of the local ethnic peoples, but small numbers of Syrians, Greeks, and Lebanese also lived in the communities, and they, too, integrated. Harold Bloom ate regularly at the Rosemary Restaurant, owned by a Greek, Charlie Thanos, and Bernie Szabo was a close friend of another Greek restaurateur, Johnny Karvelis, who like him was an immigrant with a thick accent. The Lebanese Hatem family had a clothing shop in Roanoke Rapids, and the Syrian Eliases owned a grocery in Weldon. The Kittners were friendly with neighboring storekeepers, the Rabils, a Lebanese Catholic family. Louis Kittner and Frank Rabil helped each other in business, and their sons were best friends growing up.

Jews in the South were often looked upon as living matriarchs and patriarchs who stepped from the pages of the Bible. "You're one of the originals," Ellis Farber was told. Jews were of the blood of the savior. But Jews were also damned as Christ-killers. Harry Freid "didn't sense any anti-Semitism" growing up, but childhood Christian friends reminded him, "You killed Christ." Occasionally, a customer might tell a storekeeper that he was going to "Jew you down." Sarah Kittner added, "In so many instances non-Jewish people have been brought up to think a certain way about Jews." Betty Liverman recalled once looking out the window when the Temple was still above the store and seeing kids making obscene gestures.

Social acceptance did not foreclose prejudice. Betty Bloom remembered planning a trip with friends to Virginia Beach only to be told that they could not stay at the same hotel because it was restricted. She noted, "I was never friendly with those people again." Eugene Bloom also smarted at a bank meeting when a man, who had sold his business to a Jewish couple, made anti-Semitic remarks. Although Harold Bloom was a respected civic and business leader, his immigrant accent drew jokes and comments. Harriet Bloom recalled, "I said something one night, and he was so pleased. It was time they got called up short." There was even a reverse discrimination. A client informed Steve Bloom that he had picked his name from an attorneys' list because he had been told that a Jewish lawyer was best.

Jewish children found friends among their Christian neighbors and schoolmates. Harriet Bloom joined friends for Halloween pranks, but thankfully was absent when they got caught trying to put "Shake, Rattle, and Roll" on the amplifier of the First Baptist Church. The Liverman girls were high-school cheerleaders. Lyn Szabo attended cotillion and was

invited to proms and dances. Despite their acceptance, they, too, often had memories of being taunted as a “damn Jew” or a “Jew baby.” On the playgrounds, Diane Bloom remembered, “Jew” could be thrown at her as if it were a “dirty word.” Harriet Bloom recalled, “One time a boy in the fifth grade, he was the meanest guy, called me a ‘damned Jew.’” She invited him to meet her behind her house for a fight, but he never showed. Betty Liverman was “very aware...that I was probably not going to be welcomed into certain places, certain families at certain times.” She would never be a debutante. People “might be nice to me in a public sort of way,” she felt, “but I shouldn’t expect to go but so far in certain situations.” On the other hand, for companionship, on Sunday nights she went to a Methodist youth group at a nearby church with her Christian friends. Lyn Szabo’s parents also encouraged her to join her friends at church, and she even attended Vacation Bible School. Her parents permitted her to interdate, but she “never would have considered intermarriage.”

Children comfortably crossed religious lines because, as Jody Kittner Laibstain put it, “My parents instilled a Jewish identity into us at an early age.” Susan Bloom Farber enjoyably sang Christmas music because “I never felt in any way that I wanted to be Christian. Our sense of being Jewish was very, very strong.” At lunchtime Bert Kittner walked from her elementary school to her grandmother’s house for “kreplach, stuffed cabbage and luschen kugel.” Well stuffed with Jewish soul food, she finished the school day among classmates who ate ham and bacon. Jewish children learned to live in two worlds, but they also had to know when and where lines could not be crossed. The Diamonds were once summoned to their son’s elementary school after the sixth-grade teacher complained that Lee had not completed a classroom assignment on “What Jesus Means to Me.” “This

woman had graduated from college and didn't know a thing about Judaism," Ruth Diamond observed.

Each individual represented the entire Jewish people, and one's personal behavior reflected on them all. Maralyn Farber recalled how her Aunt Louise sat her down as a child and explained that "you have to do everything better than the gentiles because if you do that you won't experience any discrimination or anti-Semitism." As a piano teacher, Louise felt obliged to set an example of hard, honest work, and she played the piano until her fingers bled. "We always had a very respected family, a Jewish family," Isabel Freid Vatz believed. "We were good citizens." Betty Liverman felt that her family's good name "was a responsibility which I took pretty seriously."

The larger community admired Jews for their civic spirit and activism. "They were always such community-minded people," real-estate agent Judy Burch observed. "They served on hospital boards, school boards." As a newcomer, Laverne Cohen felt comfortable because local Jews enjoyed such a "wonderful reputation." Jews cited the example of their parents who implanted Jewish values in them. Louis Kittner had impressed upon his sons the Talmudic injunction that "the highest attribute of man is to have a good name." In turn, his grandchildren learned "whenever possible volunteer to help, treat friends like family and family like friends." Harry Freid liked to quote his father, who told him, "It doesn't cost anything to be nice to people." Danny Coblenz, who worked at the Freid store, recalled his Uncle Harry teaching him "to be respectful, to be honest, to tell the truth." Mark Farber knew that "Uncle Ellis wouldn't take 'no' for an answer. He demanded from us as much love as he gave us." Ellis often said that he "tried to live by three things in my life: to build not destroy, to do good not evil, to love not hate."

Dave Bloom never “wavered from his religion,” Bari Novey recalled, and he instructed his grandson to respect the good in people regardless of race or religion. Jews felt grateful for their success and warm reception, and they wanted to “give back to their community,” as Betty Bloom put it. “Eugene has always been civic minded, and his father before him was the same.” Eugene recalled, “My father told me time and time again to always help people in need.” Diane Bloom McCabe noted, “It was never a sacrifice. My grandfather lived his life in gratitude.” She saw the same in her father.

Beyond their civic involvement, Jews were personally benevolent. Danny Coblenz remembered impoverished customers who came to the Freid store needing a suit to bury a dead relative. They would explain that crops were bad, and they had no money. Harry Freid’s response was, “Here, let me fix you up.” Not always was he paid back. Fannye Marks was quick for a loan to a friend in need. “Forget it, don’t pay it back” was her response. Dave Bloom, who served as president of the Emporia town council, was quietly generous. If a customer was hard pressed, the Blooms still extended credit, trusting their customers to repay when better times came. Bari Novey once saw his grandfather loading clothes into the car of a customer whose account was past due, but his grandfather admonished him not to worry as long as he had food on his own table. When Dave Bloom died in 1969, Emporia lowered its flags, and offices and businesses closed so citizens could attend the funeral. After the family closed its store in 1988, the Blooms received “tons of letters” from people recalling how Dave Bloom had paid hospital and funeral bills, donated money to build a country church, or helped a child who had polio. To repay debts, people even sent cash, which was either returned or donated to charity. Dave Bloom’s son Eugene followed his example. When

Eugene Bloom died in 2001, the *Independent-Messenger* wrote on its front page, “No words seem to really say how much Emporia-Greenville will mourn the loss of one of its most-loved citizens. Everyone will miss him.” A magazine reported that Bloom was “known by everyone as ‘the nicest man I ever met.’”

Harold Bloom, active in the Exchange Club and Masons and Shriners, was a much-honored citizen, who was recalled at his death as a “very ethical businessman... a good family man” who “did a lot of charitable work that nobody knew about.” A preacher noted of Ellis Farber that “if he were of a different faith, they would elevate him to sainthood.” Farber’s list of civic affiliations was long, but he was also remembered as someone who helped others personally and quietly. Scotland Neck honored him as Chief Marshall of the Crepe Myrtle Festival. In his memory the Temple furnished the lobby of The Scotland Neck Senior Center. Even in death, Preacher Bill Poteat eulogized, Ellis Farber “will always be with us”: “You see his influence, his work, his building, his friends, his store—his love is all over town.” Fannye Marks ran benefit shows that raised thousands for the Hospital Guild and the Episcopal Parish House, which served as a meeting place for civic clubs. On January 22, 1995, Roanoke Rapids celebrated “Fannye’s Day,” an event that drew hundreds to the civic center. The *Raleigh News and Observer* wrote, “Roanoke Rapids would scarcely be the same without Fannye Marks.” When Louis Kittner died, former UNC Chancellor Robert House wrote his widow that “Louis seemed to me to have discovered and lived out in honor what America is all about.” A Methodist minister noted that Ruth Diamond “has borne the insensitivities that people in the majority so often and sometimes unconsciously express and inflict on others.” He cited her “rare ability to see the good, rather than the bad, in people.”

Despite their benevolence, Jews still found themselves excluded from some clubs and societies. Jews were aware of a “five o’clock shadow,” or, as Harry Golden described it, “segregation at sundown.” During the day Jews and Christians engaged in civic and business activities but separated socially in the evenings. After Harry Kittner returned from the Marines in 1946, he was nominated to the Rotary Club. Active in the Jaycees, Red Cross, Boy Scouts, and Weldon Business Bureau, he felt that he had a “good name in town.” Instead, he was blackballed, which provoked two members to walk out. Forty years later he learned that the person who had blackballed him was someone whom he had known well. “No Jewish women was ever invited to join the Book Club or the Thursday Afternoon Club,” Sarah Kittner observed, not even Louise Farber who served on the Library Board. (Evelyn Freid received a belated invitation in 1998.) On the other hand, Jewish women were members and even leaders of the Music Club and the Junior Women’s Club.

When the Weldon Country Club organized, Mike Josephson joined but dropped out because he was not a golfer. After northern, textile-mill executives took control, Jews were blackballed. Harold Bloom “had been an integral part of the community, knew all the merchants, had a fine relationship, but when he wanted to join the country club, it was restricted,” his daughter Harriet recalled. Her father was “shocked.” The Freids lived on the golf course but could not play it. The Livermans’ applications to join were rejected although they attended functions there with Christians in their social circle. Their friends were “somewhat sensitive about it,” Liverman recalled, and several, without their knowledge, acted to get them accepted. Checking into a New York hotel, the Livermans were handed a telegram advising them to reapply. After they joined, other Jews did,

too. The Livermans' store, which catered to the country-club set, opened social doors. The Liverman daughters eventually had their wedding receptions at the club. Freid and Farber children recalled spending their "whole lives" on the golf course. By the early 2000s the club admitted black members. The Diamonds had a similar experience in Warrenton. After they were denied admission to the country club, a friend brought them into membership. The Diamonds joined so their children Lee and Helen could join their friends at the pool. Hy Diamond won numerous golf trophies. Yet, Ruth Diamond reflected, "I was never comfortable there. I never felt I belonged there."

In other communities Jews found acceptance. Ellis Farber was a charter member of the Scotfield Country Club. The Emporia country club welcomed Jewish members from the first. Photos show Izzy Novey and Charlie Bloom playing golf there in the 1930s, and Charlie served on the board. Betty and Eugene Bloom also joined. Even after the Weldon club opened to Jews, Harold Bloom preferred to drive to Emporia from Roanoke Rapids twice weekly rather than play the local course.

Jews did not feel that discrimination reflected community sentiment, but ascribed it to a few individuals. Jews always appreciated the religious sensitivity of their Christian friends. Bill Kittner felt grateful to the Methodist Church Women's Circle, which cooked meals for the Rotary Club. While others ate ham or pork, he was served hamburger. When Lillian Bloom was home recovering from a stroke, the Baptist minister, Reverend Dailey, visited her and asked to pray for her, but in God's name only. When her daughter Susan sang in the Peace College choir, the voice teacher offered to exempt her from singing the Easter or Christmas cantatas. Confronted by prejudice, Jews noted how quickly

and warmly their Christian friends responded. At the Roanoke Rapids World Day of Prayer, a minister occasionally invoked the name of Christ although it was an ecumenical event. After one such incident, a “very upset” Methodist minister apologized to Bill Kittner. When he returned to his store, the minister called again. At his senior prom, Ben “Bootsy” Marks was stunned when his friends were admitted to a party at the country club, but he was stopped at the door and told he lacked a “special invitation.” His friends responded, “We know what’s going on here. If Bootsy can’t go in, none of us are going, come on guys, let’s go.” The party moved to a friend’s house. “It kind of floored me,” Ben recalls, and the depth of loyalty touched him deeply.

For the most part, civic doors opened to Jews. Since the nation’s earliest days, the Masons and Shriners had always welcomed Jewish members, and numerous Jews were members of the local lodge. Rose Specter and Ray Bloom joined Eastern Star. Flo Bloom ran charities, including the PTA and the Girl Scouts. Although a newly arrived northerner with an immigrant husband, Shirley Szabo was invited to join Emporia’s prestigious Women’s Club. Kiwanis also welcomed Jewish members. Louise Farber, a former schoolteacher, was the public library’s secretary and was instrumental in erecting a new building. In Scotland Neck her brother Ellis served as president of Kiwanis, the Merchant’s Association, and the Scotland Neck Savings and Loan. In Warrenton Hy Diamond, who never lost his Brooklyn accent, was active in the Lions, Masons, American Legion, and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Sarah Kittner felt welcome when moving to Weldon. With Evelyn Freid she worked for Meals on Wheels, and she also received the American Cancer Society’s Sword of Hope Award as volunteer of the year. In 1983 she was

appointed to the Board of Halifax Community College. “I felt the Community College was the best thing we had going for Halifax County at the time,” she noted. Fannye Marks congratulated her because not only was Sarah a Jew and a woman, but she was not a native. In 1996 the HCC Board selected her as its chair, which she remembers as “one of the proudest moments of my life.” Sarah and Harry Kittner endowed the Rose and Louis Kittner Memorial Scholarship, and through Harry Kittner, who served on the HCC’s Foundation Board, the Freid, Farber, Marks, and Liverman families underwrote memorial scholarships to enable needy students to advance their educations.

Since their youths Jews were especially active in scouting. For 25 years Ellis Farber was a Boy Scout leader and a Scout Master, serving on the East Carolina Council of Boy Scouts of America. Both Sarah Kittner and Evelyn Freid were active in Girl Scout work, and the Sisterhood sponsored Troop Number 531. In 1996 200 people gathered in Weldon to honor Bill and Harry Kittner with the Boy Scouts Distinguished Citizens of the Year Award.

Jews had always served on the boards of banks, savings and loans, business bureaus, and chambers of commerce. As mills closed, Jews were among the leaders in seeking ways to reinvigorate local economies. Eugene Bloom co-founded and served as president of the Emporia-Greenville Industrial Development Corporation. He also founded the Virginia Peanut Festival, which annually drew 20,000. President of the Emporia-Greenville Chamber of Commerce, he received its Lifetime Achievement Award and was named “First Citizen of Emporia.” In Weldon Bill Kittner served as chair of the Farmer’s Market, and he also chaired the merged chapters of the Weldon-Roanoke Rapids Red Cross and Chamber of Commerce. In Roanoke Rapids Bob Liverman, a bank

director, did not feel that his being a Jew and a northerner were ever obstacles to his civic leadership. He chaired the Roanoke Rapids Valley Chapter of the American Red Cross, and at the invitation of the mayor, a close friend, he served on the Bi-Racial Human Relations Committee, which mediated between black and white. He was founding chair of the Housing Authority, and during his 26 years of service led the building of multi-story public homes, primarily for African Americans.

Jews were especially dedicated to health care, and many served on hospital boards. Harry Kittner chaired the board of the new Halifax Memorial Hospital. Emporia was without a hospital, and local medical facilities fell short of urban standards. Betty Bloom had given birth in the back of a doctor's office. In the 1960s Eugene Bloom went to the mills where he urged workers to "give a buck" each week to bring a hospital to Emporia. He served as the hospital's first board chairman and, as its president for 25 years, was fondly known as "the father of Greensville Memorial Hospital." The hospital's Retirement Home was named in his honor. Betty Bloom, who served as president of the Woman's Club, founded the local hospital auxiliary and rose to the presidency of the Virginia Association of Hospital Auxiliaries.

"They were givers and not takers," Bari Novey observed. In a 1999 letter from The Weldon Baptist Church to Bill Kittner, Pastor D. Wayne Martin noted the "love and respect" church members have held for the Jewish community for many years. "We remember with great admiration the contributions the kind and gracious people of Temple Emanu-El have made to the life and well-being of our community," the Pastor wrote. Attorney Richard Allsbrook, who had many close Jewish friends, never saw Jews as a collectivity, but, as the community ended, he reflected, "They were outstanding, respected citizens who

generously and effectively contributed so much to our entire area. I always was impressed by their close, warm feelings not only among themselves but also as extended to others, and their hospitality to all was well known.”

Civil Rights

Bonds of community extended across race lines. The local counties were heavily African American, and many stores depended on black trade. The Permans in Warrenton hired a large African American who was stationed in the back of their store to cut fatback for the customers. Bari Novey noted that about half their store’s clientele was black. “We had a reputation of selling nice products at a reasonable price,” he added. In race relations, as was typical of the South, Jewish stores were seen as different. “We knew the blacks and they knew us,” Harry Kittner observed.

Across the South Jews were often the first local merchants to hire African Americans as clerks. “My Dad was probably the first in Lawrenceville,” Bari Novey noted, “but he always treated everybody well.” In Weldon Harry Freid was also the first to do so. “When I hired my first black in my store, some of these white people tried to boycott my store, but that passed,” Harry Freid recalled. Bloom’s Department Store was among the first, if not the first, in Emporia to offer credit to African Americans.

The civil-rights movement put Southern Jews in a difficult position as national Jewish defense organizations like the Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Congress, and American Jewish Committee took legal and political action in support of desegregation. In Warrenton Ruth Diamond noted that Jewish civil-rights workers from the north “started all the problems here.” Although she did not have personal relations

with these activists, she observed that they were well known to be Jews. White extremists saw Jewish hands behind the movement while black protestors targeted Jewish-owned stores. Jews sought to preserve peace, security, and quiet. The Temple was located in an African-American neighborhood.

"Jewish people have always been more liberal in their thinking," Bill Kittner felt. However much Jews sympathized with blacks, "Jews were white people," Maralyn Farber noted, and they did much of their "business with the good ol' boys." Some African-Americans threatened to organize protests at their stores if Jews pulled their children from the newly desegregated schools. Caught in the middle, the storekeepers had families to support and did not want to endanger their livelihoods.

Jews had reasons to be fearful. White extremists planted bombs at synagogues across the South in the late 1950s, including Gastonia and Charlotte. Temple Emanu-El responded by installing protective glass in its stained-glass windows. In Emporia Diane Bloom was "actively frightened" even though the Klan directed its hatred at blacks; "I was aware that we could easily be a target as well." At the Trailways bus station in Roanoke Rapids Harriet Bloom saw Ku Klux Klan literature. The Klan revived in the 1960s and 1970s, but it was a pathetic shadow of its old self. When the Klan received a permit to march through Weldon, crowds of townspeople, black and white, gathered on the sidewalk to watch. "There were more police on the sidewalk than in the Klan," Harry Kittner recalled. "The most pitiable bunch of folks that you'd ever seen, with sheets pulled over them. They were just a laughingstock."

Desegregation locally did not succumb to violence as it did in urban areas. The community was cautious. "A group got together with some black leaders to talk it over, to keep

everything calm and cool, and see if we can't work out these problems together," Bill Kittner observed. The black leadership consisted of educators and ministers, some of whom were "outspoken." In the 1960s, across the South, black power activists were increasingly asserting leadership, and the established, moderate leadership came into conflict with younger militants.

Stores were picketed in Weldon. The Kittners recalled that their black customers walked through the picket lines, telling them that "nobody is going to tell me where to shop." They did recall that "some of the more vocal black leaders" demanded that they hire blacks even to the point of telling them whom they should hire. The Kittners instead hired another woman, who proved to be a loyal and popular employee. They noted that their black and white employees "got along fine" and "were like family." In Warrenton demonstrations were more violent, and Hy Diamond once had to lock his front door and let the patrons out the back.

Jews were regarded as kindly, liberal employers, and many storekeepers recalled the loyalty of their African-American employees, some of whom worked for 25 or 30 years. "We treated people right, we really did," Isabel Freid Vatz felt. One African-American employee worked for the Freids for more than 40 years and was kept on the payroll even after an aneurysm disabled him. Bonds of affection transcended racial and class differences. Evelyn Freid took a liking to a personable black youth, Melvin Ivey, who mowed their lawn. Hired in the store, he became a lifetime employee and manager. The Freids employed an African-American woman as a nanny, Mary Davis, who lived two blocks from the home. When their mother fell ill, she was nursed by an African-American woman, who later sat with the family on the front row at their mother's funeral. The Farbers

employed a woman named Neil, who was “considered really like a member of the family,” Maralyn Farber recalled. Neil raised her, and she brought her children to the Farber house as playmates. Later, she worked for Ellis Farber, who remembered her generously in his will.

When he purchased a commercial bakery, Jack Fox told his employees that he “didn’t care whether they were white, black or green or what they believed in, if they were good people they would get raises and promotions.” When he promoted a black employee to supervisor, word spread in the African-American community. Unusual for the times, his black supervisors were invited to his home for parties. “We ourselves are a minority, and you don’t discriminate against another minority,” Fox believed.

The segregated public schools were a contentious issue for Jews. However they sympathized with integration, they were also concerned about their children’s safety and welfare. “Integration hit, and it was not pretty,” Maralyn Farber recalled. After several years of token desegregation, the system integrated entirely, and the all-black Ralph J. Bunche High School became Weldon High School. White flight headed toward Roanoke Rapids, which was perceived to have better schools, while others went to boarding schools or the newly formed Halifax Academy. Parents were concerned that their children “would miss out on the social opportunities” without white classmates. Whatever their racial views, parents expressed concern about the quality of the education. Debbie and Mimi Freid attended schools in Roanoke Rapids where their parents also had a store and maintained a small apartment.

Harry Kittner, who served on the Weldon school board, was aware of the riots that had hit other cities, but he was committed to integration, his son Ben recalled. An African-

American doctor cited Harry Kittner as the reason that local schools had a relatively smooth transition. His two older children attended the newly integrated schools, as did two of his nieces. "It was definitely strange to go to tenth grade and suddenly it was a 70 percent black school," Ben recalled. One Kittner daughter was taunted as a "Jew," but this experience was isolated. Her tormentor later became a minister. Their youngest son, Sam, finished high school at a Quaker boarding school in Pennsylvania. Maralyn Farber's parents gave her the choice of attending the newly integrated public school or the white academy. She went to the former all-black school, and she had a very difficult year. Racial tensions and bomb threats impeded classroom learning. She transferred to the Halifax Academy, a nominally Christian school, where she graduated as the only Jew in a class of 16. Other Jewish children followed.

An Interfaith Community

Both the Jewish and Christian communities were committed to interfaith relations. Beyond personal friendships, Jews and Christians forged institutional links through pulpit exchanges, ecumenical services, and national brotherhood programs. Small-town Jews were frequently called to explain Judaism to curious Christians. Rabbis especially were expected to speak before Lion and Rotary Clubs or at public schools. Bob Liverman recalled speaking several times a year before various groups. No one ever tried to convert him. "I was well received in the civic clubs and churches," he recalled. Once a high-school teacher in Emporia asked Eugene Bloom to speak to students who did not know what a Jew was. Bill Kittner was invited to serve on the board of Halifax Academy, which his daughter attended, even though it called itself a Christian academy.

Calls for brotherhood grew louder in the wake of the world war and the Holocaust. They intensified in the 1950s when a global threat of a godless communism raised anxieties here, too. In the 1950s the “Jewish minister,” as the newspaper identified Rabbi Harold Friedman, spoke before the Roanoke Rapids Lions Club. He urged America to take a leadership role in world affairs, but said that the nation must “make our democracy work here at home” through “allegiance to the unifying secular doctrine of religious tolerance.” After the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, when an Interfaith Community Memorial Service was held at the Weldon Methodist Church, Dr. William B. Furie, the circuit-riding executive director, delivered the keynote sermon on “A Challenge to Church and School.” *The Roanoke News* reprinted the entire sermon on its front page. He called education and religion “the two handmaidens of hope” and implored those gathered to join “this battle for meaningful Christian-democratic living.” Jews and Christians worshipping together in Weldon’s Methodist sanctuary, he said, was a “hopeful harbinger of a bright tomorrow.”

Ellis Farber traveled to country churches to preach “what it meant to be a Jew.” Maralyn Farber recalled, “He would explain that Jesus was a Jew, and this was Jesus’ language, and he would explain what it is like to be a Jew.” Maralyn would then sing in Hebrew. “He was one of the country people, a country Jew, and he could speak the language of these people, and they adored him,” she observed. Ellis lunched on Sundays with the after-church crowd, befriending people in an effort to “demystify” Judaism and create goodwill. One Sunday morning a Baptist minister called Ellis wanting to know why he was not at church. The church was holding an anniversary celebration, and Ellis was the featured speaker. “We can’t start without you,” the preacher told him.

Jews and Christians alike pointed to their religions' common origin. A Methodist minister noted that Ruth Diamond "has made us better Christians because she taught us about Judaism, the parent religion of Christianity." On Passover local Jewish families sent matzoh and sacramental wine to local ministers. At the request of several churches Ruth Diamond conducted ecumenical seders. "They looked upon me with amazement," she observed. "They didn't know what a Jew was." Seven Warrenton churches—Baptist, Catholic, Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian—held seders during the Passover season. Just as Christians had contributed to build the Temple, Jews like Ellis Farber donated to local church building efforts. When a local church burned in 2000, the Temple gave funds for its rebuilding.

Church, school, and community colleges groups frequently toured the Temple. Jewish kids who attended Weldon Elementary School recall walking across the street for a class trip to the synagogue. As part of a "back-to-church" campaign, members of five Masonic lodges attended Temple services in 1957. Another year the Senior Youth Fellowship of the First Methodist Church of Roanoke Rapids came to learn about Jewish rituals and symbols. In 1965 Weldon Brownie Troops 565 and 566 gathered in the Temple's succah to observe the "ancient festival." In spring, 2000, 100 students from Halifax Community College visited the Temple where Bill Kittner explained Jewish symbols, and weeks later 25 members of Rehobeth Church in Jackson came. Jews reciprocated with church visits. "All my friends were Christian," Rhoda Kittner recalled, "they would come to Temple with me, they liked it, and sometimes I would go to church with them"

The civic community made gestures of respect and friendship. For Jewish holidays newspapers printed features describing the festival and highlighting local observances. An

undated editorial by Bill Hess in the *Roanoke Rapids Daily Herald* wished the Jewish families a “shalom aleichem.” When visiting rabbis stayed at the Holiday Inn, the motel picked up the tab. The Roanoke Rapids Area Association of Christian Ministers sent High Holiday greetings to the Jewish community, and Jews received Rosh Hashana and Hanukkah cards from Christian friends.

Every February the National Conference of Christians and Jews held Brotherhood Week, which featured pulpit exchanges. “Brotherhood, man’s concern for his fellowman, has always been a basic principle of the Jewish faith,” Rabbi Harold Friedman wrote. Reverend E. W. Glass of the Weldon Baptist Church cited a common theme of “world peace and brotherhood” in the teachings of Isaiah and Jesus. Circuit Riding Rabbi Ei Gottesman published a guide on “Judaism and Brotherhood” that contained ecumenical readings drawn from Jewish texts. The Rabbi described brotherhood as “a basic precept of Judaism,” saying that “the whole of our faith” can be summed in Hillel’s admonition—“What you would not wish others to do unto you do not unto others.” Two years later a Friday-night service featured four ministers.

Another ecumenical tradition was an interfaith service on Thanksgiving Eve. At the 1997 gathering congregants from the Community Freewill Baptist Church, Grace Episcopal Church, Weldon Baptist Church, and Weldon United Methodist Church came to Temple Emanu-El. The service began with a Methodist minister issuing the call to prayer and ended with the Suffolk rabbi giving a benediction. Christian and Jew read responsively. Ellis Farber’s text stressed the Jewish roots of Americanism. Borrowing imagery more commonly associated with Israel than with America, Farber prayed that “this land may be a beacon light to many peoples.” Hymns of “Praise to the Lord, the

Almighty” were sung, and all joined for the traditional, “We Gather Together.” A 1989 service noted that “all have been pilgrims” to America, and four congregations blended voices for “America the Beautiful.” The service ended with a collection for the needy, and then all met in the social hall for “fellowship and light refreshment.”

By the 1990s the interfaith dialogues evolved into a multicultural agenda. The Halifax County Community College sponsored Diversity Week, and Bill Kittner brought Jewish symbols for a display. The College honored him with its Diversity Award. Jews also educated the community about the Holocaust. The congregation purchased 30 copies of the documentary book, *The Holocaust Chronicle*, which Bill Kittner and Harry Freid brought to local schools, libraries, and colleges. The Temple also distributed copies of Maurice Weinstein’s edition of *Zebulon Vance and “The Scattered Nation,”* the civil-war governor’s celebrated philo-Semitic speech.



Eugene Bloom



Bill Kittner explains Judaism to students at the Temple

VI

Reforming Judaism

The 1970s were transitional years as a once vibrant congregation responded to community changes. In 1976 Temple Emanu-El affiliated with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the governing body of the Reform movement. By 1979 the circuit-riding project had ended. The congregation contracted for a bi-weekly, later a monthly, visit by a student rabbi from Hebrew Union College. Rabbi Amy Scheinerman first came to the Temple to conduct high holidays in 1982. The Reform movement had been ordaining women only since 1972, and, arriving at her first pulpit, she recalled that her initial reception was polite but guarded. HUC assigned rabbis regardless of gender, and women often encountered resistance. "That was the territory for women in those days," the Rabbi recalled. "After the first service, Erev Rosh Hashana, and the first sermon, the ice melted entirely, completely, it just evaporated, and all their warmth, affection, and loveliness were there," the Rabbi remembered. The following year when Rabbi Judy Shanks served the community, Rabbi Scheinerman felt "terribly jealous" that she could not share the holiday with such a delightful community. In 1986, two years after her ordination, she returned for a six-year tenure as a monthly congregational rabbi.

In accepting women as rabbis Temple Emanu-El was following trends in American Judaism that advanced gender equality. "We knew that we were in a liberal congregation when the services were delayed a few minutes while the rabbi finished nursing the baby," Laverne Cohen recalled. In addition to the bris, circumcision for boys, a "Covenant of Life" ceremony welcomed girls into "the long, proud chain

of our tradition.” Victoria Katherine Bloom was greeted with a *berachah habah*, “Blessed is she who comes in the name of the Lord!” Other women served as rabbis, including Jan Kaufman and Helga Newmark. Only 23, Rabbi Kaufman held Reform ordination but, like the congregation, was traditional in her outlook. Rabbi Newmark was a Dutch Holocaust survivor who turned to rabbinic studies as a 64-year old grandmother.

Rabbi Scheinerman recognized the community’s strengths. “One of the things that was always a delight was that the members took a special interest in adult education,” the Rabbi remembered. “They wanted to learn, they wanted to discuss, they were interested in everything.” Members took turns holding adult education classes in their homes on such subjects as Jewish views of death. The Rabbi noted that community bonds were stronger than common genes. “A couple of generations ago, somebody married somebody, and they’re connected somehow,” as the Rabbi put it. Over generations these families had spent lifetimes together, sharing births and deaths, childhood escapades and adult responsibilities.

In 1987 as the community celebrated its 75th year, Ellis Farber noted, “We have had controversies throughout the years. We have always solved our differences in a friendly and amicable manner.” He added, “Today we are heirs to the spiritual heritage handed down by the founders of our congregation. The legacy they left us was the root planted and nourished by them so that their loyal and sincere devotion may continue through generations that our communities shall remain as a Jewish way of life among our congregants. We again look forward with optimism as we again hear the voices of children, the religious, educational, and social participation of our congregation and the togetherness that has kept us as a family dedicated to our Jewish heritage.”

In 1988 the congregation counted 61 members living in 27 households: eight in Roanoke Rapids, six in Emporia and Weldon, four in Enfield, and one each in Jackson, Lawrenceville, and Warrenton. Others were out-of-town friends. Fourteen children still resided in the communities. In the past 50 years the community had not grown. "A lot of the discussions that would go on after services would be, you know we heard somebody moved in, we got to get in touch with them," Rabbi Scheinerman recalled. "Everybody was pulled in as family and treated like an old timer," regardless whether they were native Southerners or northern newcomers. The Knox family enrolled their kids in the religious school. Sam and Laverne Cohen, who had first come to Lake Gaston in 1977, recalled, "We were taken in like long lost children. They welcomed us wholeheartedly that they never even mentioned dues for an entire year." If they missed a Friday night service, friends called inquiring, "Are you all right? Is everything OK?"

Rosh Hashana and Passover drew large crowds as the tradition of holiday homecomings continued, a custom that was also very southern. "They had tight families," Rabbi Scheinerman observed. "The kids all came home, grown kids, they all came, and in time with grandchildren. The place was bursting on the haggim (holidays). They couldn't seat them all. One big, extended family reunion." Passover seders were festive. Often children brought college friends, both Jewish and Christian. "I'd have to do the cooking," Sarah Kittner recalled. "We'd have 35 people."

The intimacy of the community as an extended family survived the congregational diaspora. "When we'd come back, they all knew where we'd been, what we'd done, who we'd been dating, who we were marrying, what was with our kids," Nancy Liverman remembered. "I loved growing up

there.” She brought her children back as often as she could. Her children, too, held “wonderful memories” of holidays at the Temple. For Harriet Guin-Kittner these joyful visits revived childhood memories of family and tradition, of holidays and summer vacations in Weldon. “I literally had soul food from brisket to prayer,” she recalled. Her sister Susan Hunting called Weldon “my shtetl.” She preferred Temple Emanu-El to her large Reform congregation in Philadelphia. Susan Jane Vatz Abel, who lived in Charlotte, took her newborn daughters Naomi and Alissa to be named in the congregation, which her Freid grandparents had helped found. As Harry Kittner noted of his own children, “They couldn’t wait to leave Weldon, but in later years they loved to come back to visit.”

Bob Liverman remained lay prayer leader for Friday-night services or, in his absence, Bill Kittner presided. Liverman also led the community seder. Once Rabbi Scheinerman called hours before Yom Kippur to say that she was hospitalized with pregnancy complications. She faxed her sermons, and Liverman made a quick study of the liturgy, donned a kittel (white robe), and with congregational help led a memorable service. With the Reform affiliation, the congregation put aside the Conservative Silverman siddur, to the initial consternation of Ellis Farber, and adopted the pluralistic *Likrat Shabbat*. When a rabbi was unavailable for funerals or unveilings, Liverman conducted services in Emporia or Roanoke Rapids, backed up by Bill Kittner. Ellis Farber and Bill Kittner also participated in out-of-town funerals. Once a funeral home in Ahoskie called Bill Kittner to perform the service for an unaffiliated, intermarried woman from an old German-Jewish family in Scotland Neck who wanted Jewish rites. Bill Kittner’s temple responsibilities extended to “grass cutting and bathroom fixing.”

Only a handful of children remained in the religious school, which parents taught, supplemented by tutoring from the visiting rabbi. To prepare for his bar mitzvah, Sam Kittner remembered how Rabbi Arnold Fertig came down from Hebrew Union College and made cassette tapes for him to study. After 1993 the community no longer supported rabbinic visits. Brenda Britton, a schoolteacher in Roanoke Rapids, conducted a weekly class for the few remaining children, alternating between a home in Emporia and the Temple in Weldon. "We had our own way of doing things," Sam Kittner reflected. "We had to improvise." When Sam and Bobbi Kittner wed, a court clerk first legally married them, and then Robert Liverman performed a religious ceremony.



Rabbi David Krauss leads adult ed with Sarah Kittner and Evelyn Freid



Florence Coblenz, Fannie Marks, Lena Liverman, Ida Jerrett, Rose Spire, and Ida Josephson



Rabbi Scheinerman, Ellis Farber, and Rober Liberman

VII

Closing a Chapter

The local economy was changing. A century earlier, with the rise of mill and market towns, places like Emporia, Weldon, and Roanoke Rapids prospered and drew Jewish merchants. As the textile industry succumbed to foreign competition and mills closed, the towns struggled. Downtown dry-goods stores could not compete with malls, outlet stores, and discount chains. Merchants were “tired of losing money,” as Betty Bloom put it, and closed shop. Blooms had grown to two clothing stores, a shoe store, and five dime stores, but they started closing in the 1970s and 1980s. Sam Marks shut his shoe store in 1973. The Szabos sold their factories in 1976 and moved to Fayetteville. The Diamonds, the last Jewish merchants in Warrenton, closed their store in 1981. The mercantile generation was aging and retiring, and their children had moved on to careers elsewhere. Fannye’s dress shop was still thriving, but Fannye was inactive, and Marcella Liverman was having health problems. Ellis Farber downsized his Scotland Neck clothing store. “This is the last generation of small, independent stores,” Harry Fried observed. When Kittners closed in 1998, a longtime customer complained to Sarah Kittner, “Oh my Lord. My daddy always said a town without a Jew ain’t no town at all.”

Places that made the transition into the high-tech economy or supported medical, academic, or retirement centers—like Greenville, Chapel Hill, Charlotte, Durham, Richmond, Raleigh, or Virginia Beach—drew Jews. What was happening to local Jewry was part of a national—in fact, a global—trend. Where once a majority of Jews were self-employed or worked in retail trades, they were now engaged as wage-

earning managers and professionals. “A college education was expected,” Joan Bloom Benas recalled, and the rising generation, with anti-Semitic barriers removed from the workplace, saw brighter opportunities in metropolitan areas where they could also find larger, more resourceful Jewish communities. Few, if any, were interested in returning to their parents’ small-town stores. With generational changes, congregations closed, and organizations like B’nai B’rith or the NCAJW declined or fell apart.

“None of the kids remained in Roanoke Rapids,” Bob Liverman observed. Bari Novey, who closed his store in 2003, told his children that “retailing had never been high paying so I insisted that they do something else.” His children studied law, nursing, and computer science. Ruth Diamond wanted her children to do “better things” in larger Jewish communities. Other families felt similarly. Rhoda Kittner recalled her parents telling her to “move on.” Indeed, this pattern was not confined to Jews alone. Educated youth continued to depart, and local populations declined. Churches also confronted diminished memberships.

One strong motive for Jews to move to metropolitan communities was the desire to find Jewish spouses. Those who remained were more likely to intermarry. As Nancy Liverman recalled, the parental message was, “Go off and meet and marry someone Jewish, which some of us did and a lot of us didn’t.” There was also an expectation not to move too far away from the family. Henry Farber’s family expressed some consternation when he settled in distant Atlanta, but they were mollified when he soon met and married a Jewish woman.

The few third-generation Jews who did remain did not work in the stores but found professional opportunities. Mark Novey, with a master’s degree from the University of Virginia, joined a technology company in Emporia. After

working briefly at the family store, Lisa Kittner, with a degree from East Carolina, joined the Emporia health department. After college Steve Bloom, too, worked at first in the family store but then went to the University of Richmond Law School. A local attorney “begged” him to join his Emporia firm, and he later became a judge.

The third generation, even more than the second, had big-city ambitions. Maralyn Farber recalled staying up late at night, listening on radio to her New York cousin, the broadcaster Barry Farber, as if his voice were a siren call to leave. Sam Kittner confessed that he was a “wannabe Yankee,” who wished to put the civil war and civil rights behind him. Both Maralyn and Sam headed to the DC area where Maralyn Farber, with a master’s degree, was a social worker and Sam Kittner became a commercial photographer. Ben and Bert Kittner were professionals in the Research Triangle, and Betty Kittner taught at Guilford Technical Community College. Henry Farber was an Atlanta journalist. Debbie and Mimi Freid with their husbands settled in Raleigh and Wilmington. Helen and Lee Diamond became synagogue activists in Baltimore and Charlotte respectively. Rhoda Kittner was a schoolteacher in Charlotte while her sister Jody settled in Norfolk, where she managed a copy center. Lyn Szabo Green was a psychotherapist in Fayetteville while her sister Valerie was a lawyer in the Washington area. Nancy Liverman headed to the University of Pennsylvania and taught at a nursing school while her sister Betty, after graduating from UNC, taught school in Maryland. Allison Novey was a nurse in Franklin, North Carolina.

As their children scattered, parents fretted about the Jewish futures of their grandchildren, especially as intermarriage made inroads into the local community as it did to Jews nationally. “We had a strong Jewish home. We

observed Shabbat. Attended temple regularly. Our children had a certain amount of education, both were confirmed,” Bob Liverman reflected. Both his daughters married Jews, but his grandchildren’s spouses included a Korean and an Italian as well as a Jew. Unlike earlier generations where intermarriage often meant abandoning Jewish community, now intermarried Jews raised their children as Jews with the support of their Christian spouses. Harry Freid recalled how his Baltimore relatives had said kaddish (mourner’s prayer) for some cousins who had intermarried, but when his daughters did so it was an “accepted thing here.” His grandchildren were enrolled in Sunday schools, and his daughter Debbie was active at the Wilmington temple. Bari and Joanie Novey noted that the non-Jewish spouses of their children felt “very good” about raising their grandchildren as Jews, and one intended to convert. Lisa Kittner Latham’s daughter Hillary was “proud to be a Jew,” her grandmother Ida observed, and Susan Bloom Farber noted how her daughter committed to raise her children as Jews before the rabbi conducted her interfaith marriage. The Temple Emanu-El community was highly typical of emerging trends.

“Our good friend Ellis Farber used to say, ‘There will be a Jewish community in Weldon ten or fifteen years from now, forever,’” Harry Kittner reflected. “But you’ve got to look at the handwriting on the wall. It’s happening all over. Wilson just sold their synagogue building. Tarboro’s closed up years ago. Goldsboro closed up their synagogue.” He thought the congregation should draw up a will. He pressed the congregation to consider what to do with its yahrzeit plaques to ensure the continuing recitation of kaddish in memory of the community’s dead.

In the 1980s and 1990s the community’s attrition accelerated. Pillars of the community were dying or retiring

to communities near their children in metropolitan areas of Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. When Ellis Farber died in 1998, a part of the community passed away. Fannye Marks died in 1999, followed by Hy Diamond a year later. Bob Liverman moved to the Virginia Beach area. Harry and Sarah Kittner retired to Chapel Hill to be closer to their children. "I fussed with my brother all the time," Isabel Freid Vatz recalled of Harry. "You're going to be the last Jew in Weldon." Bill Kittner said, "I don't want to leave because I don't want to leave Harry Freid by himself." Harry Freid responded, "I don't want to leave Bill by himself." They argued over who would be the last to turn out the lights. After his wife Evelyn passed away, Harry Freid joined his daughter Debbie in Wilmington while Bill and Ida left for Norfolk. Morton and Sophie Farber moved closer to their daughter Maralyn in Maryland.

Bill Kittner continued to lead Friday-night services, but, as the community dwindled, they might draw but five worshipers. With at least three worshipers present, the congregation counted children, or a Torah scroll, or a chumash (Pentateuch) to make a minyan. If only two attended, then worship was understood to be private and individual. One tradition that persisted was holiday homecomings, which, with the community's decline, became especially meaningful.

A meeting on September 11, 1999, was convened to discuss the Temple's future. Bob Liverman wanted the Torah scrolls and yahrzeit plaques kept within 100 miles of Weldon. He also suggested creating a university endowment for Jewish education. Eugene Bloom hoped that "new Jewish people may come to the area." Others suggested recording oral histories and publishing a book to commemorate the community. Congregations in Chapel Hill and Virginia Beach expressed interest in the Temple's Judaica. Nothing was resolved.

An April, 2000, meeting drew 15 members “to review what is to be done with the Temple in the future,” Bill Kittner explained. Charles and Nancy Marks brought a rabbi from Virginia Beach, who expressed interest. Bill Kittner had met with officials of Halifax Community College and proposed preserving the building as a multicultural center. The sentiment of the members was to enter into an agreement with HCC. Lisa Kittner Latham suggested that the congregants could still meet there on holidays and hold occasional services. Nancy Liverman Marks did not want to see 100 years of Judaism end. Bari Novey, congregational president, noted that the Temple brought Jews community respect. Ida Kittner wanted to maintain the legacy for the children and grandchildren. Questions were raised about the Temple’s listing on the “Historic Register.” Did that mean that the windows could not be removed?

On November 3, 2000, nine members—Eugene and Betty Bloom, Bill and Ida Kittner, Morton and Sophie Farber, Harry and Evelyn Freid, and Bari Novey—gathered to discuss the Temple’s fate. Bill and Ida Kittner were retiring to Norfolk, effectively ending the congregation’s viability. Eugene Bloom moved that the congregation wait before deciding, and that motion carried. Recognition was made of David Kittner’s generosity in sustaining the Temple. “We tried and tried and tried,” president Novey lamented. He struggled to convene monthly Friday-night services, but the only ones attending were Lisa Latham, Brenda Britton, and his family. New families could not compensate for the losses. A husband and wife team of doctors from Canada settled in Roanoke Rapids, but they were Orthodox, and the Temple was too liberal. The congregation no longer sustained a Sunday School to create another Jewish generation.

The congregants were trying to forestall the inevitable.

“It was sad,” Sarah Kittner reflected. “I was very emotional. We were a kissing congregation, like one big family.” Bari Novey added, “It just breaks your heart that there was a little congregation in Weldon, and now there’s not.” Brenda Britton, who tutored Jewish children, lamented, “I do miss it, but it gave us a foundation through the congregation, and that’s still there.” Mimi Freid Cook felt, “One of the hardest things for me is the way families are so dispersed, you don’t feel like you have that closeness.” In the fall, 2006, the Temple building was sold to the Reverend Curtis Ransom, minister of an African-American church. Since his childhood, he recalled, he had worn clothes from Kittners.

Jewish communities do not so much die as move on. One Temple Torah scroll was installed at Beth Chaverim in Virginia Beach, which also took the yahrzeit plaques. “We look upon this much like a parent giving up a child it no longer can properly support, choosing Beth Chaverim as the best home for the child,” Bob Liverman said. The second Torah was loaned to the Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina and placed at Havurat Olam, a new congregation in Concord. “It was a mitzvah,” Harry Kittner observed. “We wanted the Torah to be used for living Judaism,” Sarah Kittner added. At an emotional service in Concord this Torah was re-dedicated at the bar mitzvah of Erik Thiede with the Freid, Diamond, and Kittner families present. Harry Kittner spoke of a Torah that was once asleep, but now was awake. Raymond Kessler, a Havurat Olam member, held the Torah and commented, “As glad as we were to get the scroll, it had to be sad for them.” He felt overwhelmed: “I had my hands on the most sacred text. I was speechless.” At the Havurah’s High Holiday services Rhoda Kittner, now living in Charlotte, was given the honor of dressing the Torah.

The Temple’s Judaica followed similar paths. Through

the efforts of Frances Levy Birshtein, the Berger-Goldrich Home for the aged of Beth Sholom Village in Virginia Beach created a Temple Emanu-El Chapel for its 120 residents. The Temple's piano, Torah holders, and stained glass windows were re-installed, and the ark and reading desk were refurbished. Overseeing the design was Sheldon Leavitt, son of the Temple's original architect. The Chapel held afternoon services daily as well as holiday and Shabbat services. "We'll think about them every time we admire the art and those stunning stained glass windows," Frances Birshtein said. "Our new sanctuary will always have a little of the spirit of Weldon, North Carolina, in it, and we will be proud to tell the story of how one Jewish community's loss became another's gain." At Shabbat services on April 10, 2005, the chapel was dedicated with Bill Kittner and Robert Liverman leading a processional. Henry Farber, Lisa Kittner Latham, and Mimi Freid Cook participated in the service. "Whenever we go to the shul at Beth Sholom," Rabbi Arthur Ruberg observed, "we feel the presence of Weldon."

A second set of windows was created for a Chapel Emanu-El at the Chapel Hill Kehillah. On the bimah were chairs, candelabra, an eternal light, and a reading desk from the Temple. The congregation's membership included children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of Temple Emanu-El's founding members, Louis and Rose Kittner. On December 10, 2005—coincidentally, the birthday of Ellis Farber—a dedicatory ceremony was held. The Chapel was underwritten by the Samuel and Rebecca Kardon Foundation, David Kittner, President. Members of Temple Emanu-El gathered at the ceremony for a reunion. Maralyn Farber and David Kittner led readings, and Temple Emanu-El members stood before the Torah, which had been brought from Concord, for a group aliyah (Torah reading). Bert Kittner

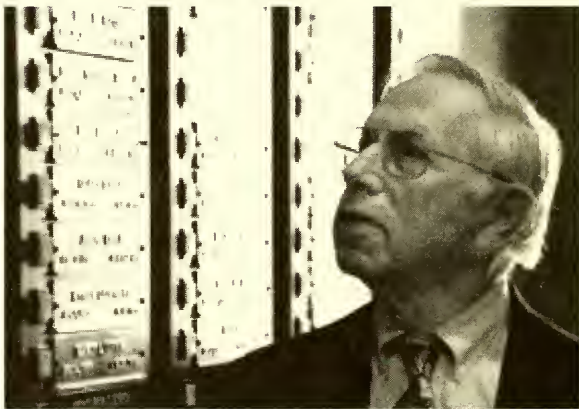
remembered the community, expressing appreciation for their “sweetness...the wonderful and lasting gifts” of friendship. “These relationships have a texture and a quality that is hard to define—it is like having an extra set of uncles, aunts and cousins—friends for life,” Bert recalled. She felt that a fiddler, a remembrance of her grandparents’ generation, had climbed on the roof of her minivan when she left Weldon for Chapel Hill. “Our heritage and our collective memories sustain us and move with us wherever we go,” she concluded.

Temple members brought their Jewish commitment to new communities. “Growing up in a small town with few other Jews,” Joan Bloom Benas reflected, “in the long run, strengthened my resolve and taught me what was lasting and precious.” She traced her Jewish activism in Norfolk to the “seeds planted in this wonderful community.” Her sister Harriet agreed, “My parents recognized the need for me to feel a part of the community.” Harriet organized a Hadassah chapter in Virginia Beach and led Young Judea. Her friend Janice Specter Kingoff was a Hadassah activist in Wilmington, and Susan Bloom Farber served as a docent at the National Holocaust Museum. Harry Freid joined his daughter at Wilmington’s Temple of Israel. Harry and Sarah Kittner helped found the Chapel Hill Kehillah. Bill and Ida Kittner joined Beth El in Norfolk and led a weekly service at Beth Sholom. Thanks to the community elders, Lee Diamond had the religious training to lead Sabbath services when he served in Vietnam. Jody Kittner Laibstain undertook an adult bat mitzvah and left a business career to teach preschoolers at a Jewish Day School in Norfolk. Roland Specter, whose father was a Friday-night fixture at Temple Emanu-El, rarely missed a Shabbat service in Petersburg. “As I grew older,” Sam Kittner reflected, “I came to appreciate immensely what a great and wonderful experience it was where you had

a place of worship where you were surrounded by family and close friends.” For Diane Bloom McCabe, “Every holiday there is a pull on the heart for the community that we had.” Semi-retired in Virginia Beach, Ben Marks added, “Sometimes I wish that I live there now.”

Rabbi Scheinerman expressed her own heartfelt memories of the Jewish legacy of the Temple Emanu-El congregation:

They understood what was most important. They understood about community and taking care of one another and preserving traditions that could be preserved. They knew when and how to be flexible, and they always knew that people are most important. They understood what a congregation is supposed to be: that it should be a big, extended family for everybody. They not only understood it, but they lived it. Would that every congregation do what they did.



Harry Kittner with the yahrzeit plaques

Acknowledgements

Jews have been called an ever-dying people, and when Temple Emanu-El closed its doors after nearly a century in Weldon, that prophecy seemed to have had some local truth. But Jewish communities do not so much die as move on, and bonds of community can no more be broken than those of family. I learned that as I called upon members of Temple Emanu-El to tell their stories. *An Extended Family* takes its title from a phrase that I heard repeatedly as congregational members affectionately remembered the place and people from whence they came. Newcomers often commented on how quickly and warmly they were brought into the Temple Emanu-El community, and, as a stranger to the congregation, I have felt that generosity of spirit. The pleasure of this project was encountering so many people of genuine courtesy, kindness, and character. The richness of their experience as Jews and Southerners was evident in their voices, in the accents that still revealed such a strong sense of place. They were Virginians and North Carolinians, but they remained Jews, too, and they took special pride in creating Jewish community in a place where it was rare and unexpected. *An Extended Family* would not have been possible without the contributions of so many in the community, Jewish and Christian alike, who shared their memories. I first thank Harry Kittner and Sarah Kittner for their time, wisdom, patience and commitment. Whitt Joyner contributed his incomparable knowledge. Bill Kittner and Bob Liverman donated congregational records. Sam Kittner, Mimi Freid Cook, and Jimmy Farber sent photographs. Research draws on papers, correspondence, clippings, publications, and oral histories held by the Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina. Temple Emanu-El records are now maintained in the archives of the Jewish Heritage

Foundation of North Carolina. I thank Temple Emanu-El for endowing this project, and the JHFNC, president Henry Greene particularly, for providing support. My wish would have been to list all those who sent memoirs, answered my phone calls, or opened their homes to be interviewed, but in the interests of economy, end notes and bibliography will be posted on the website, www.jfhnc.org. Your names and stories are in these pages.



Photos courtesy of Sam Kittner